



HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

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March 31, 2021

President Reyes Gonzalez
Saint Augustine College
1345 W. Argyle Street
Chicago, IL 60640

Dear President Gonzalez:

The interim report you submitted to our office has now been reviewed. The staff analysis of the report is attached.

On behalf of the Higher Learning Commission staff received the report on 1) an assessment plan that engages entire community and has course level, program level and co-curricular goals that are tied to institutional goals, 2) evidence of institutional completion goals, 3) evidence that data from programs and unit operations inform the budget prioritization process, and, 4) an update on the implementation of the new strategic plan. No further reports are required on these topics.

An interim report is due 10/1/2021 on enrollment and finances.

The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2023 – 2024.

For more information on the interim report process contact Lil Nakutis, Accreditation Processes Manager, at lnakutis@hlcommission.org. Your HLC staff liaison is Tom Bordenkircher (tbordenkircher@hlcommission.org).

Thank you.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION



STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: March 31, 2021

STAFF LIAISON: Tom Bordenkircher

REVIEWED BY: Sherilyn W. Poole

INSTITUTION: Saint Augustine College, Chicago, IL

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Dr. Reyes Gonzalez, President

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION AND SOURCES: An interim report is required by 12/31/2020 on 1) an assessment plan that engages entire community and has course level, program level and co-curricular goals that are tied to institutional goals, 2) evidence of institutional completion goals, 3) evidence that data from programs and unit operations are inform the budget prioritization process, and, 4) an update on the implementation of the new strategic plan.

This interim report derives from the Team Report of the institution's 2018 Comprehensive Evaluation.

REPORT PRESENTATION AND QUALITY: The interim report was organized in sections to respond to the four areas of concern identified in the HLC Action Letter (August 7, 2018). The interim report opened with an introduction to St. Augustine College (SAC) and included a description of the College's focus on delivering college-level instruction to a mostly Latino student population and its designation as a federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution. Each section of the interim report provided a clear description of the activities and initiatives implemented by SAC in response to the areas of concern identified by the Team which conducted the 2018 Comprehensive Evaluation. Active links in the interim report send the reader to documents and materials which support the College's efforts.

REPORT SUMMARY: Area of concern one (4.B) required SAC to demonstrate the ways the College "engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students." The SAC Assessment Plan identifies the alignment between course, program, and institutional objectives and includes the measurement tools used to assess learning outcomes. The review schedules demonstrate "a systematic and consistent approach to assessment." Descriptions of the assessment activities of the five institutional learning goals included the specific activities implemented, the results and findings, and identified action items designed to improve educational outcomes. Program level assessments are conducted

every three years with oversight by School Chairs. Program assessments include internal, external, and student assessments and result in a plan of action based on findings and input from stakeholders. Assessment of co-curricular programming and activities began in 2019 but was halted with the goal to move forward with co-curricular assessment in 2020. General Education learning outcomes are assessed as a program and General Education is included in the program review schedule as the AALAS Program. The interim report described the SAC “processes and methodologies to assess student learning that reflect good practices...” The College responded to this by developing the Latino Educational Model which includes three pillars: high touch, high support, and high tech. The interim report described these three pillars and the ways they focus on the specific needs of Latino students.

Area of concern two (4.C) required the College to set “goals that seek to increase retention, persistence and completion rates in its degrees and certificates.” The College used several means to assess the effectiveness of the Spring and Summer 2020 sessions including instructor and course evaluations through Canvas, a Student Satisfaction Survey, and tests, rubrics, portfolios and performance assessments to create summative and formative assessments. A Student Persistence and Retention Task Force was created in 2019. One outcome of the Task Force was the new Student Success Center to provide student access to early intervention services including “counseling, tutoring, career/transfer advisement, academic advising, student life support, and mentoring.” Two new courses were developed, Preparation for College Life and Using Technology for Success, to give students assistance and information to improve their persistence and retention rates. Data on persistence and retention from several years were reviewed by the Assessment Committee and discussed in meetings with other College staff members. These meetings and discussions resulted in Action Items focused on improving the collection and analysis of persistence and retention data.

Area of concern three required the College to provide “evidence that data from programs and unit operations are informing the budget prioritization process.” A new President assumed the position in July 2018 and “immediately began addressing the urgent financial needs of the College.” SAC is recognized as a highly regarded Hispanic-serving institution, but competition from other institutions for recruiting and enrolling Hispanic students increased the need for the College to expand and increase its presence in the marketplace. The President and his Senior staff have implemented specific data-driven budget measures. Several of these measures include:

- Establishing an institutional budget development process based on hard numbers,
- Implementing cost-cutting steps to immediately address the disparity between the College’s revenue and expenses through an Assess, Plan, Do strategy,
- Reducing salary and benefits to employees, amending the health insurance plan, discontinuing self-operating childcare services, and eliminating carryover of unused vacation, and reviewing contracts, and

- Forming several committees including faculty, staff, and administrators to review expenditures and identify areas for cost-cutting.

Area of concern four required the College to provide an update on the implementation of the new strategic plan. Prior to the completion of the strategic plan the former President resigned, and the Board of Trustees put the plan development on hold. When the current President assumed the position and realized the College's financial status, he selected three strategic priorities "drawn from the substance of the 2018-22 strategic plan" as the immediate need and focus for SAC. The three priorities are:

- 1) Achieve Financial Stability and Sustainability – Strategic Priority #1
- 2) Upgrade Technology Systems and Capabilities – Strategic Priority #2
- 3) Strengthen Academics and Student Support – Strategic Priority #3

The President communicated these three priorities to the Board of Trustees and to the campus constituents through a series of meetings. To achieve Strategic Priority #1 the College implemented cost-saving measures, growth-related programs and initiatives, maximizing revenue from existing students, improving retention and student success, deploying new and enhanced marketing campaigns, and expanding the College's performance through a distance educational model and new programs. To address Strategic Priority #2, the College "upgraded its technology organization and structure." These upgrades included email, electronic storage, and web applications. The focus for Strategic Priority #3 was "positioning the College for new delivery models, including online modality and technology-assisted educational programs." This included developing two new courses to support students and developing a Prequalification Instructors Training Course required of all faculty teaching in the online modality. The College redesigned its organizational structure including revising the academic structure.

REPORT ANALYSIS: The interim report provided comprehensive information and descriptions of the activities and initiatives planned and implemented to response to the four areas of concern identified in the HLC Action Letter. Highlights of SAC's responses are shown below.

Area of Concern One

- SAC participated in the HLC Assessment Academy and took advantage of the resources, information, and mentorship provided,
- The Assessment Plan includes descriptions of the alignment between course, program, and institutional learning goals,
- Action items included faculty meetings to discuss the results of assessment activities,
- An evaluation of English courses was scheduled for December 2020,
- Rubrics and assessment tools were reviewed including midterm and final exam scores from several courses,
- Schedules and calendars to guide assessment activities were developed,

- Training sessions were held for faculty to expand their understanding of the assessment process and goals, and
- Co-curricular program and activities objectives assessment was paused in 2019 and was scheduled to start again in 2020.

Area of Concern Two

- Faculty referenced several resources (AAC&U Principles of Excellence, the Lumina Foundation Degree Qualifications Profile, data from other higher education institutions) and results of employee surveys for ideas for establishing criteria for setting retention, persistence, and completion goals,
- A Student Persistence and Retention Task Force was established which resulted in the Student Success Center where students are able to access resources to support their learning activities,
- Two new courses were designed and offered (Preparation for College Life and Using Technology for Success) focused on increasing students' motivation for persistence and retention to complete their programs,
- The Assessment Committee reviewed institutional data and issued a persistence and completion report using institutional data. Fluctuations in the data over the past several years occurred probably due to "different calculations from different people in the previous years," and initially prevented the faculty from setting retention and persistence goals,
- The Interim Director of Assessment and Accreditation collected institutional data and disseminated them to the members of several committees and the Faculty Council to guide the establishment of appropriate, achievable persistence and retention goals, and
- Several co-curricular activities were put in place, many as a result of the change to the online modality in response to COVID-19. These included library staff working through the summer to ensure students would have access to all virtual resources at the start of Fall 2020 and shifting in-person tutoring to online tutoring.

Area of Concern 3

- Under the leadership of the new President, immediate cost-cutting measures were implemented to address the College's financial situation. At the same time, priorities in key foundational areas (people, processes, technology/systems), were identified to establish and align budget priorities to help ensure long-term sustainability and growth,
- An 18-member committee was formed charged with performing College-wide assessments and identifying ways to reduce expenses and increase revenue. The Committee's review included human resources expenses, contractual commitments, "sunsetting of non-critical, revenue-negative academic programs, and the elimination of high-cost full-time faculty", and
- A number of activities focused on systematic, integrated budget planning and prioritization.

Area of Concern 4

- Prior to creating a new multi-year Strategic Plan, the new President set three Strategic Priorities to improve the College's financial standing, upgrade technology systems, and strengthen academics and student support.
- Activities designed to strengthen the College's financial stability and sustainability included decreasing expenditures and increasing revenue, examining opportunities for increasing academic programs, such as adjusting pricing and tuition options, and increasing the number of students being retained by increasing student support.
- College marketing efforts were re-designed and a new customer service was implemented to support enrollment activities.
- Organizational changes were made. A Latino Education Committee was established and housed in Academic Affairs.
- Three Schools, Education, STEAM, and Healthcare and Social Sciences were created, each one with a Chair leading it.

ANALYSIS CONCLUDING STATEMENT: The College is commended for implementing thoughtful and intentional efforts to strengthen its financial situation and academic programs. Saint Augustine College's responses to the four areas of concern were organized, inclusive, and comprehensive. Activities and initiatives were assigned to committees and councils and each was given an appropriate charge to address. After completing reviews of data and research, having numerous discussions with constituents and stakeholders, and remembering its commitment to "low-income, bilingual Hispanic adults," the College has positioned itself to continue to provide strong academic programs and support services to students. The College should be prepared to provide updates on the activities and initiatives described in this report in preparation for its reaffirmation of accreditation in 2023-2024.

STAFF FINDING:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s) 4.B
Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- ☒ Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
- ☐ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
- ☐ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
- ☐ Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

STAFF FINDING:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s) 4.C

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- ☒ X Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
- ☐ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
- ☐ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
- ☐ Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

STAFF FINDING:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s) 5.C

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- ☒ X Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
- ☐ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
- ☐ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
- ☐ Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

STAFF ACTION: Receive the report on 1) an assessment plan that engages entire community and has course level, program level and co-curricular goals that are tied to institutional goals, 2) evidence of institutional completion goals, 3) evidence that data from programs and unit operations inform the budget prioritization process, and, 4) an update on the implementation of the new strategic plan. No further reports are required on these topics.

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