RedRocks
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A SUMMARY REPORT ON THE RRCC SYSTEMS APPRAISAL
Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)
The Higher Learning Commission NCA
October 5, 2012

As an AQIP college, RRCC develops a comprehensive Systems Portfolio of key processes and systems. The Portfolio is updated annually and undergoes an appraisal every four years. RRCC also conducts and updates Action Projects each year to improve quality. The results of the Action Projects and System Portfolio Appraisal are taken into consideration at the end of each seven year AQIP cycle. The end of the cycle culminates in a review for re-affirmation of accreditation.

This Summary is about the most recent RRCC Systems Portfolio Appraisal Feedback Report. The College received this report on September 13, 2012. This Summary will present important areas of strength and opportunities for improvement from this report. The intent is to summarize the findings as actionable feedback for use in planning at RRCC.

The System Appraisal has several sections. The first section is the ***Strategic and Accreditation Issues Analysis***. This section evaluates whether RRCC meets basic criteria for accreditation. The second section is the ***Critical Characteristics Analysis***. The Critical Characteristics section identifies the critical and distinctive characteristics of Red Rocks. The third and final section, ***Category Feedback***, gives more detailed evaluation of each of the nine AQIP Categories.

This Summary Report will start with the ***Critical Characteristics*** section. This section points out those characteristics the reviewers see as a foundation for future directions. These characteristics can be summarized as follows.

1. The reviewers found our shared governance model and the Collaboration Council to be important features of our leadership and decision making processes. They also noted that administrative support at RRCC is incorporated into the strategic planning process. The vision, mission, and values were also cited as defining features.

2. The student service infrastructure also drew positive reviewer attention. The Career Center, the forthcoming Degree Works early warning system, the Learning Commons, co-curricular student support, student life, the Children's Center, Child Care Innovations, and student clubs were all cited.

3. Programs in renewable energy and environmental quality, and the Red Rocks Institute for Sustainability in Education (RISE) were mentioned as distinctive educational initiatives. Concurrent programming with Warren Tech was also noted.

4. The crucial role that the new Human Resources Office plays in mission accomplishment, and employee alignment with the institution, is also a distinctive feature. The reviewers noted that the Foundation plays a prominent learning support role and received "Non-Profit Organization of the Year" by the West Chamber of Jefferson County.

5. The new light rail station is a distinctive feature that may increase access. However, recent enrollment growth coupled with decreases in state funding has been a significant constraint. The reviewers also cited challenges in maintaining morale given several successive years with no pay raises, an increasing student body, and increasing staff demands.

6. The reviewers noted that RRCC identified three significant data components: the interactive dashboard, a survey of community partners, and the Course Signals early warning system. The reviewers also mentioned survey use to determine student and stakeholder needs.

The ***Category Feedback*** section selects significant processes for RRCC under the nine AQIP categories and designates them with either **S** or **SS** to identify strengths, or designates them with **O** or **OO** to identify areas for improvement. The following table shows the overall results across all categories. Note that reviewers need not comment on all processes under each category so the total number varies from appraisal to appraisal.

	"O"	*%*	*"OO"*	*%*	*"S"*	*%*	*"SS"*	*%*
2008 Appraisal	74	49%	26	17%	50	33%	1	1%
2012 Appraisal	83	60%	11	8%	39	28%	5	4%

The reviewers cited the following as ***very great strengths*** **("SS")** for RRCC.

1. Category 1 (Helping Students Learn) - RRCC has **multiple methods and structures in place to help underprepared students**, including the Office of Disability Services, Connect to Success, College Connections, tutoring, prescribed learning paths, and a new program-based non-contextualized and integrated developmental course approach. Specifically, the Connect to Success program, one of the fastest growing programs at RRCC, concentrates on giving students the skills in academics, personal, career and college readiness.

2. Category 1 (Helping Students Learn) – RRCC has **mechanisms for both transfer and CTE to ensure that programs are up-to-date and effective**, including bi-annual articulation meetings, advisory councils, professional development, program evaluation, accreditation, and environmental scanning.

3. Category 3 – (Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs) - Using the Office of Student Services, RRCC employs a range of processes to gather information to **identify and respond to student stakeholder needs**, including advising surveys, Accuplacer testing, and student services staff. Of particular note is the "We're Listening" survey, which may serve as a best practice.

4. Category 3 – (Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs) - **Relationships with students** begin while they are still prospects through the High School Relations Office. Student Life, which is charged with building relationships with students, has developed 22 clubs, provided gathering space for the students, student leadership, and an honor society, which has gained distinction. Student government is active, and student representatives serve on advisory boards and the College's Collaboration Council.

5. Category 4 – (Valuing People) - The RRCC Director of Human Resources (HR) analyzes personnel reports to ascertain which employees are retirement eligible and also works with the senior leadership team every academic year to **plan strategically for future leadership needs**.

The reviewers cited the following as ***very great opportunities for improvement ("OO")*** at RRCC.

1. Category 1 (Helping Students Learn) – While RRCC states objectives in recent years have focused on student achievement, such as developmental education and an increase in student success, **the institution has yet to develop Common Student Learning Objectives** as indicated in multiple locations within this category. This question is specific to shared learning objectives, which should be the core learning outcomes shared across the institution and measured for outcome attainment. RRCC has an outstanding opportunity to develop general learning objectives and corresponding measures for attainment across the learning environment.

2. Category 1 (Helping Students Learn) - With English and Art programs as exceptions, the **student clubs appear to be interest-driven with no set of institutional co-curricular goals** which align with curricular learning objectives. RRCC might benefit from developing a distinct set of co-curricular development goals to guide the alignment of co-curricular and curricular learning.

3. Category 1 (Helping Students Learn) - Although RRCC identifies several mechanisms employed to assess student learning in the classroom, **the Portfolio makes no mention of a system wide assessment of student learning in relation to institutional learning objectives**. The institution has an outstanding opportunity to identify the processes employed in designing the system-wide assessment of student progress in meeting institutional learning objectives.

4. Category 1 (Helping Students Learn) - **It appears that assessment occurs primarily at the classroom level or informally by departments**, as identified with the math department with only some programmatic assessment occurring related to licensure programs. RRCC now has the outstanding opportunity to develop a systematic process to collect institution-wide general assessment data on a regular basis to assure general education outcomes are being attained.

5. Category 1 (Helping Students Learn) - RRCC has an outstanding opportunity to **clearly identify common program outcomes and measures that can be collected and analyzed on a regular basis,** which would enable the institution to report results.

6. Category 1 (Helping Students Learn) - For CTE programs where professional licensure is required, RRCC collects minimum program level information such as pass graduate rates. **The Portfolio presents no indication that programs other than CTE participate in program review**, **which is a requirement of accreditation**. Red Rocks has the outstanding opportunity to develop a systematic process to collect programmatic assessment results, assuring programmatic outcome attainment.

7. Category 6 (Supporting Institutional Operations) - Although RRCC follows CCCS-governed procedures when identifying support service needs of students,' with departments led by deans or vice presidents implementing needed changes, **the Portfolio does not describe how the College identifies the changes needed or determines new needs in its own support services.** RRCC might benefit from developing a process to determine needed administrative support services for its different employee groups.

8. Category 7 (Measuring Effectiveness) - RRCC appears to use an informal set of methods to select and share data related to planning and improvement efforts. RRCC might benefit from developing **systematic and comprehensive processes to identify, select, manage, and distribute information related to planning and improvement.**

9. Category 7 (Measuring Effectiveness) - **RRCC does not appear to have measures specifically identified to evaluate the performance and effectiveness of its information and knowledge management systems.**

10. Category 7 (Measuring Effectiveness) - Although **the Portfolio** provides data related to employee satisfaction for RRCC, it **does not provide data related to Measuring Effectiveness.**

11. Category 8 (Planning Continuous Improvement) - Although RRCC has evidence that Planning Continuous Improvement is effective, **the Portfolio describes no clear measures or evaluation process for planning processes and activities.**

The ***Strategic and Accreditation Issues Analysis*** section addresses the strategic issues that the reviewers felt were most closely related to RRCC's ability to succeed in reaching its mission, planning, and quality improvement goals. The Appraisal states that:

> *Accreditation issues are areas where you have not yet provided evidence that you meet the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation, or where the evidence you have presented suggests you may have difficulties, now or in the future, in meeting these expectations. If accreditation is essential for your institution then any accreditation issues identified are, by definition, also strategic.*

The most fundamental and important set of identified issues in this section have to do with those that affect compliance with the HLC *Criteria for Accreditation*. As the reviewers appraised our Portfolio they searched for Accreditation related issues and concerns. In addition, the reviewers used the Index to the Criteria for Accreditation we provided with our Portfolio to perform a comprehensive review of the Criteria and each Core Component to ascertain whether we presented compelling evidence that RRCC complies with each of these Commission expectations.

The reviewing team identified gaps in the evidence that Red Rocks Community College complies with the Five Criteria for Accreditation. In the team's judgment, we have not yet provided evidence that we meet one or more Core Components of the Commission's Five Criteria for Accreditation, or evidence we presented suggests we might have difficulties, now or in the future, in meeting these expectations. The team is not suggesting that we currently fail to comply with the Criteria, but simply that we need to present additional evidence of compliance prior to the next System Portfolio Appraisal in 2016. This, by the way, provides us with a four-year, long-term horizon for planning.

The *issues regarding accreditation* that the team identified are:

1. Criterion 3: Student Learning and Effective Teaching - The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

    Core Component 3a: The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.
    > Red Rocks Community College, as stated in the Improvements Section for Category One in the Portfolio, is working on but **does not have General Education Outcomes** established. General Education outcomes are to be attained by every graduate and are consistent with the mission and values of the institution.

    Core component 3c: The organization creates effective learning environments
    > Same as Core Component 3a - Red Rocks Community College, as stated in the Improvements Section for Category One in the Portfolio, is working on but **does not have General Education Outcomes** established.

2. Criterion 4: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge - The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

    Core Component 4b: The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.
    > **Red Rocks Community College does not have and does not assess General Education Outcomes** which are to be integral part to each program of study and to demonstrate

the attainment of the institution's mission and stated values of innovation, teamwork, diversity, communication and integrity.

The reviewing team also identified the following ***strategic issues*** for Red Rocks Community College.

- Red Rocks Community College has a significant opportunity to improve its Systems Portfolio. It appeared to the team that various authors participated in the writing of the Portfolio, which is positive in providing a variety of contributors sharing their expertise in their particular area. The risk is that the document does not communicate with one voice the processes within the institution, encompassing each Category and the institution as a whole**.** The quality of responses to the questions also raised concerns as to the level of understanding of the question and/or the availability of information in response to the question. **Responses by RRCC to process questions often provided information on "what" but not "how."** Due to the indirect and limited responses, the team questioned whether the opportunities being identified were true institutional improvement opportunities or opportunities to be more effective in communicating within the Portfolio itself.

- RRCC has a significant opportunity to conduct programmatic assessment of student learning. The Portfolio stated that programmatic objectives are provided by the Colorado Community College System. Some forms of formative assessment were noted, such as tests, papers, and portfolios. Internships were also mentioned. External programmatic accreditation was indicated for some of the technical programs, which would indicate that some level of programmatic assessment is being undertaken for these programs, but the Portfolio does not make clear whether programmatic assessment takes place for technical as well as transfer programs. The Portfolio states that a process of assessment data integration and dissemination was being developed, but no assessment data was provided. **A formalized programmatic assessment process which coordinates, collects, and compiles formative and summative programmatic assessment data is needed both for compliance with the Higher Learning Commission Criteria for Accreditation and, more importantly, for the institution to determine the effectiveness of its educational processes and overall attainment of its mission – student learning.**

- RRCC has a close association with the Colorado Community College System. This close association includes the strategic planning process. The College is given goals established by the Colorado Community College System**. It would be beneficial for RRCC to go through its own strategic planning process to solidify and own its own goals along with those of the Colorado Community College System.** Internal goals would give the institution a sense of self-direction and ownership within the resource constraints the College is facing.

- RRCC, as part of the Colorado Community College System, receives comparative data from the system's institutions with which to benchmark. **It would be beneficial, as the institution moves**

to become more process- and data-driven, to establish trend data and benchmarks associated with the institution's unique objectives and goals. This was also mentioned in the last Systems Appraisal as a strategic issue. Trend data will provide the institution with a historical reference on how effective the institutional processes have been over time as well as allow the College to assess the impact of changes made to those processes. In addition, it is also important to benchmark against other institutions outside the CCCS, to institutions within the specific service community, where more direct benchmarks may reside, such as procurement costs. In this way, the College will have a more direct and accurate reflection of performance within the service environment.

- In some areas of the Portfolio where comparative data was provided to assess the effectiveness of a process, and the data indicated an opportunity for RRCC to improve the process, subsequent follow-through by RRCC in acting on the results was not evident. **It would be beneficial for RRCC to use the information provided by process assessment and benchmarking to direct improvement efforts.** In this way, RRCC would be "closing the loop" in continuous quality improvement – moving from process to process results and assessment to improve processes.

In closing, RRCC has distinctive characteristics and great strengths based on support for students. The College also has distinctive programs based on new technologies and pre-professional preparation. Shared governance, new administrative directions, and community connections provide a positive foundation for institutional improvement through involvement of the college community and external stakeholders.

The predominant theme throughout the Appraisal document is the need to develop systemic, institution-wide processes, especially planning, learning outcomes assessment, and institutional effectiveness. General education learning outcomes are most conspicuous among these. Further, all such processes need feedback loops that will use data to get results. We need to set and consistently use effectiveness metrics and targets. Program review and assessment for all educational programs, not just CTE, is also critical.

AQIP expects that we will now use this feedback to initiate improvement. The long-term horizon for these improvements is four years – the time of our next Portfolio Appraisal. To accomplish our long-term improvement goals, we must also consider the development of annual action plans to address improvement. To develop both long and short-term improvement goals, AQIP suggests we ask some key questions in examination of the Appraisal.

- How do the team's findings challenge our assumptions about ourselves?
- Given our values, vision, and mission, which issues should we focus on?
- How will we employ results to innovate, grow, and encourage a positive culture of improvement or, in terms of RRCC values, employ the results to encourage innovation?

- How will we incorporate lessons learned from this review in our planning and operational processes?
- How will we revise the Systems Portfolio to reflect what we have learned?

Our short-term discussion should also consider our three annual Action Projects in Diversity, Efficiency in Facilities Utilization, and an Assessment Data Repository. These are significant because within a year following the Systems Appraisal, RRCC should participate in an AQIP Strategy Forum. The focus of the Forum is on what we have learned from our Appraisal and what we will determine as the major strategic priorities for RRCC for the next few years. AQIP Action Projects are the primary means to address these priorities in the short-term. Our current action projects - Diversity, Efficient Utilization, and an Assessment Repository - are all potential core strategies. In addition, Diversity is also a potential general education learning outcome.

For questions or comments about this report, please contact Tim Griffin, Executive Director of Planning, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness at Tim.Griffin@RRCC.edu or 303.914.6516.