

Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

May 4, 2023



Agenda Item: Western Iowa Tech Community College Interim Accreditation Report

State Board Priority: Preparing Learners for Tomorrow's Workforce
Ensuring Equity in Education

State Board Role/Authority: Iowa Code section 260C.47(3) grants authority to the State Board of Education to determine whether the programs of a community college shall remain accredited.

Presenter(s): Amy Gieseke, Chief
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Terry Murrell, President
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Attachment(s): One

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board grant continued accreditation for Western Iowa Tech Community College (WITCC). A state comprehensive visit will be conducted in fiscal year 2028.

Background: Attached is a report of the evaluation of WITCC for continued state accreditation as an associate degree-granting institution. The Iowa Department of Education conducted the interview portion of the evaluation on November 9-10, 2022. This report reflects the review

team's observations and determinations made during WITCC's interim visit. As mandated by Iowa Code section 260C.47, the accreditation team, including two external peer reviewers, assessed WITCC's compliance with eight Iowa State Accreditation Standards via a structured process of document review and interviews. The team also reviewed the most recent Higher Learning Commission (HLC) regional accreditation report to ensure that any findings have been addressed. Iowa's process has been designed not to duplicate the HLC accreditation process.



Accreditation Report Interim State Evaluation

Western Iowa Tech Community College

November 9-10, 2022 – Fiscal Year 2022-2023

State of Iowa
Department of Education
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Western Iowa Tech Community College
Interim Accreditation Evaluation
FY 2023 (Academic Year 2022-2023)

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Western Iowa Tech Community College

Interim Accreditation Evaluation

FY 2022-2023

Conducted November 8-9, 2023

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this review was a scheduled accreditation evaluation of Western Iowa Tech Community College (WITCC) by the Iowa Department of Education (Department) as mandated by Iowa Code section 260C.47.

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

College History

WITCC was organized in August 1966 as an area vocational technical school as provided in Chapter 280A of the Iowa Code. The first board of directors was chosen at a special school election on November 2, 1966, and they proceeded to name the institution WITCC. The first classes began on January 27, 1967, when the college accepted responsibility for one vocational and two technical postsecondary programs that were operated by Sioux City Community Schools. By fall term of 1967, 17 full-time programs were in operation and the institution assumed responsibility for all adult basic, high school completion, high school equivalency certificate and occupationally oriented adult educational programs. At that time, enrollment totaled 230 students.

During the first years of operation, WITCC offered programs at various temporary locations throughout Sioux City. In 1966, the first administrative home was the former Hobson School building and in 1968, the administrative offices were moved to the former Trinity Prep campus. In 1970, enrollment totaled 510 and a permanent campus was established, where the first building was completed and occupied during the 1970-1971 school year. In 1973, when WITCC received permission to offer a two-year associate of arts degree, the curriculum became fully comprehensive. The on-campus facility for radio station KKIT was completed in 1978, which provided public, noncommercial radio within an 80-mile radius of the city.

In the fall of 1980, construction was completed on what was then the Student Center and the Gaylord Smith Vocational Building. On-campus housing, Sun Ridge Court Apartments, was built in 1982, and in 1984, the Transportation Center was added to the Sioux City campus. In 1991, remodeling of the college's original structure allowed for two lecture halls and an interactive television classroom, which accommodated the new distance learning modality. Through community partnerships, the college expanded services by constructing its Denison Campus in 1993, followed by the Cherokee Campus and Conference Center in 1996. In 1994, extensive construction connected the college's first two structures into an instructional, student service and administrative facility known as the Dr. Robert H. Kiser Building.

Online classes were first offered in 2002, providing a new convenient platform for learning. Also, during that year, KKIT added KOJI, which brought Iowa public radio programming to the Great Lakes region for the first time. In 2003, the Denison campus was expanded by adding classroom, library and high-tech equipment space. During that same year, the first tree was planted on the Sioux City campus' Loess Hills Arboretum and Nature Trail, and the Advanced Sciences Building broke ground. Two years later, the building was dedicated and held its first classes, adding 78,000 square feet of instructional space to the Sioux City campus.

During 2007, WITCC held its first annual homecoming celebration and debuted its new Comets mascot. In 2008, the Sioux City campus expanded significantly, adding 66 acres of undeveloped woodland, prairie and watershed to its Loess Hills Arboretum and Nature Trail. A new residence hall, the Bur Oaks Suites, was also completed, housing an additional 185 students, and the Security Institute, a 37,000-square-foot facility was constructed. The institute is a collaboration between the college, Sioux City, and the county to provide an unprecedented standard of training in real-life, real-time conditions of crisis, and a new location for the county's

911 communications and city/county emergency operations. In 2009, the Beltway Center was secured as a site for housing transportation-related training, including truck driving and motorcycle handling.

In 2010, credit student enrollment reached 6,421 students, and in 2011, a new 40,000-square-foot student center was opened providing fitness and meeting facilities for students and employees. During 2012, renovations of existing facilities upgraded the student learning environments in the Kiser Building and community meeting area in the Corporate College facility. In 2014, another housing complex, Prairie Place, was added to the Sioux City Campus and a permanent WITCC Le Mars Center was opened.

In 2015, the college infused the campus and student experience with technology by providing each student with a laptop loaded with curriculum-specific software and with 24/7 internet connectivity. The Sioux City, Denison and Cherokee campuses also become interconnected with virtual classrooms. In 2016, the college celebrated 50 years of operation, and in 2017, WITCC was recognized as an Apple Distinguished School for its innovative uses of technology.

Institutional Profile²

WITCC is a publicly supported comprehensive community college serving the Iowa counties of Cherokee, Crawford, Ida, Monona, Plymouth and Woodbury. A nine-member Board of Directors, elected from the nine districts in the six-county service area, provides governance for WITCC. The college is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and is regulated by the Department. The college offers 55 career and technical education (CTE) programs (with 130 award types); 20 transfer majors; and Associate in Arts (AA), Associate in Science (AS) and Associate of General Studies (AGS) degrees at its three locations: Sioux City, Cherokee and Denison. In addition to its campuses, WITCC extends educational opportunities and services within its region through regional centers that offer career academies and concurrent enrollment courses offered in partnership with area high schools. The percentage of students that are jointly enrolled in high school and college is 42.2 percent, which ranks ninth among Iowa's community colleges (College Profile, 2021).

The college's main campus and centers serve over 6,900 students leading to university transfer and preparation for the workforce. WITCC ranked second in credit awards among the community colleges with 1,775 awards, which is impressive considering that WITCC ranked sixth in total credit enrollment among the state's community colleges (College Profile, 2021). In the 2020-2021 academic year, WITCC's students achieved a 41.6 percent graduation rate, which is sixth highest in the state; a 14.4 percent transfer rate, which is fifteenth in the state and a 48.6 percent success rate, which is tenth in the state. Additionally, the college ranked seventh in non-credit contact hours and eleventh in distance education enrollment (College Profile, 2021).

Visit Overview

Staff from the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation at the Department performed an interim accreditation review and site visit of WITCC on November 9-10, 2022. During the on-site visit, the accreditation team was very impressed with WITCC. It was apparent during the visit that WITCC is a great place to work based on the longevity of staff and faculty and their commitment to the institution and engagement in the community. It was also evident that WITCC puts students' needs and experiences first when making decisions, as illustrated by the college's investment in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); student health and mental health; parking; food services; and remodeling of facilities. Meetings with students confirmed WITCC's commitment to students, during which students reported feeling a sense of inclusion and belonging. Overall, the Department team found WITCC to be an incredibly welcoming environment.

¹ Information for this section was primarily obtained from: <https://www.witcc2.edu/about/history>

² Information for this section was obtained from the WITCC Website and from the 2021 WITCC Community College Profile Report.

ASSURANCE SUMMARY STATE STANDARDS

The college's previous comprehensive accreditation report from 2018 required the college to follow up on findings in one area. In the area of special needs, the Department found at its fiscal year 2018 (FY18) comprehensive visit that the college's nondiscrimination statement was not consistent, complete or present in many required publications. Overall, there was some evidence of progress with the nondiscrimination statement between the FY18 and FY23 visits. However, the FY23 review team noted some similar concerns found during the FY23 interim review, with another finding in the area of special needs.

Compliance with Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Criteria

The Department's state accreditation team reviewed the most recent report and information from the HLC available at the time of this evaluation. WITCC's most recent HLC accreditation letter from 2019 provided adequate evidence that the college has continuing regional accreditation. The college has an upcoming four-year assurance review in 2023 with the next reaffirmation of accreditation in 2028-2029.

Despite having continued accreditation, criteria 1C, 3D, 3E, 4A and 5D were initially marked as "met with concerns" in the HLC report. After additional evidence was provided by the college to the HLC, the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) changed criteria 1C, 3D, 3E and 4A to "met." Criterion 5D was still listed as "met with concerns" with Interim Monitoring. For this criterion, the HLC report noted that the college provided limited examples of developing and documented evidence of cases of measured performance improvement and effectiveness as it relates to the quality of its operations and that the college seemed challenged to find and present its cases showing that it has successfully "closed the loop" within diverse and significant parts of its operations. During the opening interview of the visit, WITCC administrators assured the team that they have always closed the loop but that they haven't always documented it well. They emphasized that they have been trying to do a better job of closing the loop and provided several examples illustrating their efforts, including documentation of all collaborative meetings by the Director of College Effectiveness, Internal Communications Coordinator, a committee secretary, and other designated employees.

The HLC report referred to previous reports regarding the college having a top-down structure and minimal evidence of shared governance. In the report it was recommended that the college continue work to measure its effectiveness in its governance-related processes. WITCC has responded to this by creating a shared governance structure where committees report to councils and councils report to the executive council. All councils now do their work in the board room and all committees and any new committees have to report to a council. Additionally, if an idea or concern is taken to a committee or council, the members of that committee or council have to say yes or ask for additional information instead of saying no to the initial request. The college is also working on a governance chart to supplement their organization chart so that faculty and staff are aware of which council or committee to take ideas to. Overall, it was very clear from the visit that there are efforts to improve shared governance and push leadership down so that all are brought in and working together in service of the institution.

Faculty Qualifications

All community college-employed instructors who are under contract as of July 1, 2011, who teach in CTE or arts and sciences (including adjuncts) are required to meet minimum faculty standards (Iowa Code section 260C.48). The Department team provided WITCC a random list of 25 faculty members who taught credit courses in the previous year. WITCC then provided personnel files for these faculty regarding qualifications, including supporting documentation such as college transcripts, employment applications to illustrate related work experience and third-party licensure/certification, if applicable. Members of the Department team then examined the files to determine whether the qualifications of each faculty member complied with current Iowa Code faculty standards for the courses they taught during academic year 2020-2021 (i.e., fall 2020 and spring 2021).

Following a thorough review of the 25 random faculty personnel files, members of the Department team met with WITCC's Executive Dean of Instruction, Associate Dean - Health Sciences, Associate Dean of Instruction for Career and Technical Education, Associate Dean - Corporate College, Associate Dean of Instruction and

Dean of Human Resources to learn about the college's faculty qualification review process and to discuss a few concerns raised during the review. The majority of the files provided showed evidence of utilizing the faculty qualification review process and materials that the statewide Faculty Standards Task Force provided to colleges in an effort to establish statewide consistency and compliance with HLC and Iowa criteria. The majority of faculty members reviewed were well-qualified for the courses being taught.

Finding: During the review of faculty files and on the site visit, the team noted the following issues related to faculty qualifications:

- Iowa Administrative Code 281 chapter 24.5(1) states that instructors in the area of arts and sciences shall have completed a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in a combination of the qualified fields identified as related to the field of instruction and that these 18 graduate semester hours must include at least six credits of the specific course content being taught. During the review of the faculty personnel files, the Department team noted that two faculty members teaching in the Biology (BIO) prefix, which is considered a broad discipline with specialized subfields, did not have at least six graduate semester hours in the specific discipline.

If WITCC would like to continue using these faculty members to teach the BIO prefix courses, **WITCC should provide a plan to the Department within six months demonstrating how they plan to get these faculty members adequately qualified for the specialized subfields they teach.**

- The Department team also noted that there was language in the quality faculty plans (QFP) stating that a candidate who has not met the minimum hiring requirements may be hired on a provisional basis for a maximum of three years. According to the HLC, the deadline for institutions to ensure faculty were in compliance was September 1, 2017. In discussions with the college, it was stated that this is old language and is not the current hiring practice of the institution.

To address this, **WITCC should remove the language from the QFP and any other institutional documentation about hiring faculty on a provisional basis if they have not met the minimum hiring requirements and resubmit the QFP to post on the Department website.**

- During the 2018 comprehensive state accreditation visit, it was recommended that WITCC continue to review their faculty qualification and record-keeping processes to ensure that each active instructor's file contains a complete faculty qualification form with adequate rationale and documentation for each assignment. The Department team for this review noted that several faculty files were still missing documentation, such as transcripts, updated licenses, rationale and evidence of qualifications.

To address this, **the Department team will be reviewing 25 randomly selected files in six months to ensure that documentation is adequate and consistent.**

Faculty Teaching Load

The teaching loads of full-time instructors must not exceed the faculty load limits set forth in Iowa Code. This is the case for CTE instructors, as well as for college parallel (arts and sciences) instructors (Iowa Code section 260C.48). To check compliance with this standard, the Department accreditation team reviewed the instructional loads of a random sample of 25 faculty members for whom WITCC provided documentation of their academic year 2020-2021 (AY20-21) (i.e., fall 2020 and spring 2021) teaching loads. A discussion with the Executive Dean of Instruction and other associate deans about load processes clarified the steps that the college takes to load both arts and science and CTE faculty. At the time of the desk review, one faculty member was teaching slightly over the state load limit. During the visit, the college assured the team that this was an oversight and would be monitored carefully moving forward. The Department team will review faculty load during the follow-up faculty qualifications review.

Given this oversight, the team **recommends** that college staff ensure a procedure is in place for verifying each semester that faculty loads are below state limits. Also, while the college does ensure mutual consent for

overload, it is handled through informal verification processes. The team **recommends** that WITCC formalize the college's overload agreement process so that documentation is available to clearly demonstrate that a faculty member has agreed to an overload schedule. This will help ensure that a true process for mutual consent exists for all faculty overload assignments. The team also **recommends** that WITCC develop a faculty handbook to define teaching loads and faculty qualifications.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Special Needs

Community colleges shall provide equal access to the full range of program offerings and services including, but not limited to, recruitment, enrollment and placement activities for students with special education needs or protected by state or federal civil rights regulation. Students with disabilities shall be given access to the full range of program offerings at a college through reasonable accommodations (Iowa Administrative Code 24.5(3)), with information regarding how to access such accommodations provided in a disability statement. In addition, community colleges shall have nondiscrimination statements ensuring access to educational programs and employment for state and federally protected classes. This nondiscrimination statement must list all state and federally protected classes; provide the name/title and contact information of the person(s) designated to coordinate equity, Title IX, and Section 504 compliance and provide contact information for the Office for Civil Rights in Chicago, Illinois. The nondiscrimination and disability statements may be separate or the college may choose to combine them.

The Department accreditation team conducted a desk review prior to the onsite visit in which they reviewed WITCC's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and nondiscrimination policies, statements and practices in marketing and recruitment publications, handbooks, the college catalog, the college website and sample course syllabi. During the onsite visit, the team reviewed additional documentation and conducted interviews with faculty, students and staff associated with disabilities services to ensure compliance with this standard.

During the onsite visit, the Department team saw evidence of numerous collegewide efforts to create a welcoming environment for all students, provide accommodations for students with special needs and provide opportunities for underrepresented students in particular programs of study. Some of these observed efforts include the following:

- Accommodation services are well-utilized by students. Personnel schedule voluntary follow-up appointments with students and have them follow a checklist to make sure they have access to all resources. Because of this attention to students, the accommodation services department boasts an 86 percent graduation rate. Staff in accommodation services also explore the use of innovative strategies, such as utilizing music streaming services to accommodate neurodiverse students while testing.
- The college uses Kurzweil assistive technology for literacy-related accommodations, which is considered a best practice.
- Students reported that they know who to go to if they need assistance, accommodations or have complaints. Students also stated that the college is welcoming and they feel safe on campus. They also spoke of WITCC's small class sizes and one-on-one interactions with instructors. Additionally, students reported that there is a culture of responsibility on campus.
- The college provides several services for students on campus, including, but not limited to, a mother's room, a sensory room, a prayer room, mental health resources and a health clinic on campus.
- The college utilizes an agreement with Cengage Unlimited to provide textbooks and associated instructional resources to students through a \$97 instructional fee, accommodating different learning styles and keeping costs down for students.
- There are many opportunities for diversity and inclusion. This includes a variety of student clubs, Celebration of Diverse Culture, required diversity course and SafeZone Training.
- Student activities and events are matched to learning outcomes and course objectives.
- Recruiting materials are vetted by ARRM (Admissions, Recruitment, Research and Marketing), the DEI office and the Equity Coordinator before being published and distributed.

The Department team applauds WITCC's commitment to students. In order to enhance the college experience for students, the team **recommends** the following updates:

- Post the nondiscrimination statement on the college website in multiple languages. One way to do this is to use a feature such as Google Translate, which allows translation of the entire website.
- Ensure that the complaint form in the student handbook links directly to a complaint form and not the WITCC homepage.
- Check that the Iowa College Aid link on the website directs users to the correct website.
- Consider using a generic email address instead of specific names in the nondiscrimination statements. This will make it easier to maintain consistency in the statements when staffing changes occur.
- Review and update Board policies more frequently, especially in regards to policies related to ADA.
- Replace the URL in the short nondiscrimination statement with a link that will take someone directly to the full nondiscrimination statement, instead of the college's homepage.
- Consider adding a phone number and/or email address to the short nondiscrimination statement.

Finding: The annual and continuous nondiscrimination statements must be prominent, complete and consistent on the college's website and in major publications, including handbooks and all admissions, academic, housing, financial aid and student services materials directed at students. Although the Department team saw improvements in this area from the last accreditation visit, with the statement included in most required locations, the team did notice two instances of non-compliance:

- During the desk review and on-site visit, the Department team noticed that the annual notice of nondiscrimination did not list the CTE programs with specific admission criteria as required. Since the visit, the college has made updates to the annual notice on the college's webpage to include this requirement. The Department team commends WITCC for addressing this in a timely fashion.
- While the continuous nondiscrimination statement was found in more places during this visit compared to the last visit, the Department team noticed a number of variations in regards to contact information and URL links, some of which were broken links.

To address this finding, **the Department team will review the college's nondiscrimination statements again in six months.**

CTE Program Evaluations and Review

There are a variety of state standards related to the offering of CTE programs included in Iowa Code chapter 258, 281—IAC 46.7(4), and 281—IAC 24.5(4). These standards include numerous requirements related to program and award length, program content, labor market demand, articulation, advisory committees and more. All CTE programs (including new programs and changes to existing programs) must be approved by the Department. Standards for CTE programs are included in the *Program Approval: Guidelines for Iowa Community Colleges* and in the *State Accreditation Guide* on the Department website. Community colleges are required to review at least 20 percent of their CTE programs annually, standards for which are provided in the aforementioned program approval guidelines on the Department website. The Department team reviewed WITCC's CTE program review process, schedule and a random sample of recent CTE program reviews to ensure compliance with the CTE program review standards. For the standards regarding program advisory committees' composition, roles and responsibilities, the Department team reviewed a random sample of CTE advisory committee membership lists and meeting minutes to ensure compliance.

Based on the program review documents submitted for the desk review, WITCC follows a five-year plan to review all programs. An interview with faculty and staff confirmed that at the beginning of each program review, program faculty attend an informational meeting to discuss program review information, processes, expectations and where to find institutional research data. Program faculty are also required to fill out a standardized program review questionnaire that includes questions regarding curriculum partners, assessment and success rates. The Department team applauds WITCC's efforts to include constructive feedback from different internal stakeholders, such as recruiting and student services personnel, physical plant personnel, student clubs and other areas of the college in the program review process through its program review

roundtable event. The team was pleased to see that assessment of student learning is incorporated in the program review process through the use of the *Plan-Do-Act-Check* assessment model, the mapping of competencies to course outcomes and assignments and the involvement of the college's assessment committee. Towards the end of the program review process, program faculty meet with the Executive Dean of Instruction and use program review information and feedback to develop an action plan and program goals for the next five years. The program review documentation then goes to the Academic Council for final approval. While state code only requires that CTE programs are reviewed every five years, the Department team was impressed with how action plans at the program level are reviewed on a yearly basis with the Executive Dean of Instruction.

The Department team was also impressed with these additional practices related to program review at WITCC:

- The college is working on expanding program review to arts & sciences and transfer majors.
- The college was able to provide several examples illustrating how it is very intentional about offering support to ensure that student accommodations are in place for CTE courses. This includes being innovative and adjusting instructional models to meet the needs of students.
- WITCC has two DACUM (*Developing a Curriculum*) certified facilitators.
- Program faculty incorporate advisory committee feedback in the program review process. This feedback is used to continuously update the program's curriculum.
- Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) are incorporated into the program review questionnaire.
- There is good faculty engagement in the CTE program review process.

The Department team has the following **recommendations** to improve the process even further:

- Develop an official guide or manual for the program review process. In the guide or manual, the college should attempt to align each step with the criteria required for program review as outlined in Iowa Administrative Code 281 Chapter 24.5(4). This documentation will be helpful for onboarding new faculty and staff, evaluating the effectiveness of the program review process and making data-driven decisions regarding program viability. This was listed as a recommendation in the FY18 report as well.
- More intentionally connect the program review questionnaire to the college's strategic initiatives/values and to the budget process.
- Even though the college's institutional research department provides the Department Educational Outcomes Report and the Economic Modeling Special International report to demonstrate that costs of the program are proportionate to the educational benefits received, the team recommends that the college incorporate a reflective question about proportionate costs into the program review questionnaire.
- Although WITCC already has a diverse group of students and uses Perkins funding to recruit and enroll underrepresented students, the Department team recommends that the college continue to be intentional about recruiting underrepresented students into programs and consider expanding how programs examine various success metrics disaggregated by different student populations to identify potential issues/concerns and develop strategies for removing barriers to success.
- Ensure that advisory committees are meeting twice per year. Continue to make efforts to recruit diverse advisory committee members.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

STICS Curriculum Review

The Department utilizes a web-based platform (State of Iowa Curriculum System, or STICS) for its program approval process and maintains a database of approved programs and courses. This platform performs compliance checks on all programs offered by each college. The Department program quality consultant reviewed this compliance check for WITCC's programs to ensure compliance with the state program standards. Additionally, a manual comparison of WITCC's approved academic programs in the state's database with those provided in their college catalog was conducted. Overall, minimal edits were needed to align the catalog with STICS. Minor program compliance issues were corrected with regard to the percentage

of technical core. For the instances where programs did not match the state curriculum system, the college is making the changes needed to align those programs with STICS. The review revealed one program listed in the college catalog that was not in STICS. This program was previously approved and the college provided the Program Curriculum Report (AS-28) for this program. This issue is due to errors made when moving an award from an existing program to its own standalone program.

Overall, WITCC has sound curriculum practices. Program changes are reviewed by the Curriculum Committee and the Academic Council. As a best practice, the college not only gets board approval for new programs, but summarizes any other program changes (modifications, deactivations, etc.) for the board as well. The college uses Acalog for the catalog and Curriculog for approving internal curriculum. With Acalog and Curriculog being owned by the same company, there is “communication” from Curriculog to Acalog so that any changes that occur as part of the curriculum approval process can be reflected in the catalog. The college would benefit from using the compliance report in STICS to frequently check for any future compliance issues.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Strategic Plan

Community colleges are required to update their strategic plans at least every five years as a guide for the community and its decision-making (Iowa Code section 256.31(4)(a)). The Department accreditation team reviewed WITCC’s most recent strategic plan and interviewed selected staff to ensure compliance with this standard.

WITCC utilizes a three-year strategic planning cycle rather than the required five-year cycle, demonstrated by their 2018-2020 plan and the newly approved 2021-2024 plan. Whereas older strategic plans focused on student completion, the new strategic plan is centered around college culture: *Communication—Know who we are and what we do*; *Collaboration—Cultivate inclusion, belonging, and connection*; and *Contribution—Empower people through equitable access and involvement*. The college also has values that spell out the word TECH: *Transformation, Engagement, Community, and Harmony*. The college does a great job communicating the new strategic plan and its accompanying values using signage around the campus.

The Department team was impressed with the changes that have already been made because of the strategic plan. For example, due to the strategic initiatives, the college has invested in positions that tie to its values, such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion positions and a Communications Coordinator position. Because the strategic planning process was opened up to the entire college, it created valuable leadership opportunities for faculty and staff and provided opportunities for new people to lead projects. WITCC’s work on improving shared governance is also commendable. It is clear that college leaders have an intentional strategy to give more voice to faculty and staff on committees and councils. The president of the college also has monthly recorded Town Hall meetings to give faculty and staff opportunities to discuss what is currently happening and where they are headed next.

WITCC has historically used technology for project management using their LeanKit tool. This tool not only tracks implementation at the project level, but also enables all projects and college initiatives to be aligned with specific components of the strategic plan. The college used this software to track strategic initiatives for their last strategic plan at daily stand-up meetings and plan to do the same with the new strategic plan. Currently, non-academic programs do a departmental self-assessment on a three-year cycle to evaluate the mission and strategic initiatives to see where they can do better. Budget requests, including individual budget requests, are also required to be tied to the strategic initiatives or the four values.

Although the newest strategic plan is well-developed, the Department team offers the following **recommendations**:

- Continue to work on tracking the achievement of strategic plan goals and objectives, either with a dashboard and/or occasional reports.
- Continue to build out goals at the department level that tie into institutional initiatives.

- Formally involve more external stakeholders in the development of the next strategic plan.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Physical Plant and Facilities

Each community college must present evidence of adequate planning, including a board-approved facilities plan. The community college's plan must meet state and federal requirements as outlined in the state accreditation guide. The Department accreditation team reviewed WITCC's facilities plan, which was presented to the board in January 2022, and interviewed the Vice President of Finance and Administrative Services, Director of Physical Plant and College Safety, Accommodation Services Coordinator, Safety and Security Supervisor and various other staff regarding the college's facility planning process and decision-making structure to ensure compliance with this standard.

The Department team was very impressed with the number of campus spaces and classrooms that incorporated advanced technology. The facilities were welcoming, bright and student-friendly. The facilities team is a cross-functional team that includes representation from the physical plant, academics, information technology and the branch campuses. The team meets every other week throughout the year and discusses plans for all areas of the college. Projects are tracked and reviewed during these meetings. In order to prioritize projects, the team does regular walk-throughs of the facilities and takes grants and shared governance into consideration. The Department team applauds WITCC's efforts to make ADA accommodations for students in a timely manner. CTE facility needs are reviewed on an annual basis and requests come forward through the program review action plans.

The college's commitment to safety and security were particularly impressive. The college recently changed the name of the security department to the safety department to send the message to students that staff are there to assist. Students expressed feeling safe and secure on campus. The college has a very strong security presence on campus that involves cameras, security guards, a good working relationship with the Sioux City police department and phones and duress buttons around campus. Faculty, staff and students are trained by various means, such as through ALICE trainings, training videos in the college portal, emergency response manuals and the college experience course. Employees and staff are notified of emergency situations or weather events through an opt-in text messaging service and through the college website and social media.

The Department team was very impressed with the technological advancements made on campus. It is clear that technology is engrained in the culture of the institution. They were especially impressed with how classrooms are designed to be "education on display" to mimic the real world. The college has addressed potential cybersecurity issues by using multi-factor authentication, enhancing firewalls and virus protection, using social engineering to train employees and students on phishing attempts, doing penetration testing, removing social security numbers and contracting with a cybersecurity firm.

Overall, the Department team was very impressed with the condition of the facilities, the thorough planning around facilities improvements, the collegewide integration of technology and the responsiveness of planning processes to the needs of stakeholders. The Department team did find during the desk review that the Campus Safety Report in the Student Handbook was outdated. The team **recommends** that the college link to the page where the most recent form can be found. This will ensure that the public always has access to the most recent data via the student handbook.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Quality Faculty Plans

Iowa law establishes the process for community colleges to plan for the hiring and professional development of faculty. Institutional QFP are required to meet the standards of 281-IAC 24.5(5). The Department accreditation team reviewed WITCC's QFP and interviewed members of the QFP Committee to ensure compliance with this

standard. To ensure compliance with this standard, the Department team also reviewed the QFP hours for the random sample of 25 faculty members for whom the college provided documentation.

WITCC's QFP was last approved by the Board of Trustees in September 2022 and is maintained by an eight member QFP Committee consisting of four faculty members and four administrators that meet to review and revise the plan as needed. The Department team met with the committee to discuss key components of their QFP plan to ascertain that it meets compliance requirements as it includes information regarding orientation, mentoring, committee membership composition and appointment and requires activities, known as faculty development units, to ensure that instructors attain specific minimum competencies.

As a best practice, WITCC has an Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) that has two dedicated staff members for keeping track of QFP hours, which are clearly defined in an addendum of the QFP. ACE also is responsible for faculty orientation and professional development. Orientation involves meeting with the new faculty two to three different times at the beginning of the semester where the responsibilities and expectations of each instructor are covered. The new faculty member is also introduced to the college's learning management system (LMS) during this time. In terms of professional development, every new instructor is enrolled in the Master Instructor Level I module after their first semester of teaching, followed by enrollment in the Master Instructor Level II module. These modules are designed to give a solid foundation to new instructors by orienting them to teaching basics and moving on to more advanced pedagogy. ACE also has funding to facilitate specialized training based on a program's accreditation or faculty member's needs.

The Department team was also very impressed with WITCC's faculty mentoring program. Mentoring Project Activities are included as an addendum in the QFP. There is also an application process for a faculty member to be a mentor. New faculty can provide feedback about the mentoring process with the Mentoring Project Feedback Form. The college also provides funding for faculty members to attend conferences. After attending a conference, the faculty member is expected to present how what they learned at the conference improves student learning and how it ties to strategic initiatives.

To improve the Quality Faculty Plan Process, the Department team has the following **recommendations**:

- Evaluate the QFP tracking system for efficiency to ensure faculty are attaining their QFP hours and develop a mechanism to follow up on those who are not meeting their QFP hours. This was a suggestion given from the last Department accreditation team as well.
- Develop institutional competencies.
- Thoroughly review and update the QFP more frequently. Pursuant to Iowa Administrative Code 281, Chapter 24.5(7), any time revisions are made, both the Quality Faculty Plan and Quality Faculty Plan Procedures documents should be submitted (either as a combined document or two separate documents) to the Board for consideration and approval.
- Revise the language in the Quality Faculty Plan to make sure it is factually correct (i.e., removing the statement about provisional hiring, ensuring that *Academic Center for Excellence (ACE)* is listed instead of *WITCC Staff Development Office*, etc.)

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Senior Year Plus Programs

There are a variety of requirements for Senior Year Plus (SYP) programs offered to high school students jointly enrolled in Iowa's community colleges. These requirements are included in Iowa Code Chapter 261E. Currently, the Department utilizes the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) accreditation process to ensure compliance with many statutory requirements (legislated Postsecondary Course Audit Committee). The Department accreditation team reviewed WITCC's accreditation status with NACEP, interviewed selected staff and reviewed documentation to ensure compliance with this standard.

WITCC's concurrent enrollment program, titled College Now, has maintained NACEP accreditation and is approved through AY26-27. The College Now program works within a six county area serving 26 Iowa school

districts and provides programming opportunities through various methods, including at the high schools, through career academies and online. The College Now program enrolled 3,377 unduplicated students during AY21-22 and has 71 high school instructors teaching postsecondary courses within area high schools. Additionally, the College Now program has a strong online presence annually enrolling around 1,000 students in postsecondary online courses taught by WITCC faculty members.

WITCC's Senior Year Plus program seems to operate very well and adheres to all state and NACEP standards. College Now program staff coordinate and monitor programming within the WITCC service area to ensure continuity of program processes and procedures, including the use of faculty mentors and liaisons to ensure that the rigor of programming offered within area high schools is the same as those courses taught on the college campus.

The Department team was particularly impressed with the following practices and accomplishments related to WITCC's College Now program:

- Online orientation for concurrent enrolled students, including "first-day" orientations.
- Expansion of Cengage Unlimited to the concurrent enrollment student population.
- Annual updates to educational service agreements/contracts.
- Adherence to the same accommodation process with concurrently enrolled students as regularly enrolled students.
- College Now students can receive \$1000 scholarships if they matriculate to the college as full-time students after high school graduation.
- Establishment of a culture of faculty buy-in and awareness regarding the NACEP accreditation process, including WITCC institutional support to faculty liaisons by providing a \$100 instructor stipend to conduct high school faculty site visits.
- Maintenance of a clearly established and well-documented site visit process, including documentation of any follow-up procedures and the development of action plans if deemed necessary.
- Complete information provided in the student handbook, such as the grade appeal process, process for incompletes, FERPA for directory information, and student code of conduct.

Although the Department team commends the program for several observed best practices, the Department team offers the following **recommendations**:

- The college should further expand information within the educational service agreement/contract and College Now handbooks regarding institutional responsibilities. "Will follow Senior Year Plus Guidelines" does not adequately describe the institutional rules, regulations and responsibilities associated with Senior Year Plus Programs.
- Information outlined within the current addendum to the educational service agreement/contract is outdated and reflective of prior Department guidance issued in July 2020. Information should be updated to reflect current legislative requirements enacted in March 2021 regarding "jointly established measures of college readiness."
- Within the educational services agreement/contract, the college should ensure any contract addendum is signed and board approved by both institutions (school and community college) to ensure the institution has established a legally binding contract and incorporate any addendums into the official contract the following academic year (essentially eliminating the addendum).
- WITCC should consider the establishment/creation of a centralized location for all documentation on concurrent enrollment faculty to ensure that compliance tracking is easily accessible.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Compliance with Non-Accreditation State or Federal Requirements

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Evaluation Team Recommendations

The Department community college accreditation team recommends continued accreditation for WITCC. A state comprehensive accreditation evaluation is scheduled for FY28 (i.e., Academic Year 2027-2028).