

Metropolitan State University of Denver - CO

HLC ID 1056

STANDARD PATHWAY: Mid-Cycle Review

Review Date: 4/26/2021

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Context and Nature of Review

Review Date

4/26/2021

Mid-Cycle Reviews include:

- The Year 4 Review in the Open and Standard Pathways
- The Biennial Review for Applying institutions

Reaffirmation Reviews include:

- The Year 10 Review in the Open and Standard Pathways
- The Review for Initial Candidacy for Applying institutions
- The Review for Initial Accreditation for Applying institutions
- The Year 4 Review for Standard Pathway institutions that are in their first accreditation cycle after attaining initial accreditation

Scope of Review

- Mid-Cycle Review
- Federal Compliance (if applicable)
- On-site Visit

- COVID-19 Response Form

Institutional Context

There is no institutional context.

Interactions with Constituencies

There are no interactions.

Additional Documents

There are no additional documents reviewed.

1 - Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

1.A - Core Component 1.A

The institution's mission is articulated publicly and operationalized throughout the institution.

1. The mission was developed through a process suited to the context of the institution.
2. The mission and related statements are current and reference the institution's emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development and religious or cultural purpose.
3. The mission and related statements identify the nature, scope and intended constituents of the higher education offerings and services the institution provides.
4. The institution's academic offerings, student support services and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.
5. The institution clearly articulates its mission through public information, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans or institutional priorities.

Rating

Met

Rationale

The mission at Metro State University (MSU Denver) was developed through a process suited to the context of the institution. MSU Denver's current mission statement was crafted by several governance groups and stakeholders and approved by the Board of Trustees in 2006. Modifications to the mission statement in 2010-11 included reference to master's degree programs and changing the institution's name from Metropolitan State College of Denver (MSCD) to Metro State University Denver, granted by legislative authority in April 2012. Its mission has remained unchanged since adoption of the current mission statement in 2006.

The mission and related statements are current and reference emphasis on aspects of its mission. Review of the mission and core values began in January 2019 along with the development of a new strategic plan began. The Strategic Plan Task Force members solicited opinion from both internal and external stakeholders involved in the planning process. In January 2020, the task force unveiled five pillars that would form the foundation of the Strategic Plan 2030. The pillars are foundational principles that hold up the vision: *Civic and Economic Catalyst; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Agile and Sustainable; Student Access and Achievement; and Student-Centered Academic Excellence.*

Broader trends were discovered through a review of the mission and core values such as: student

enrollment fluctuations, competition challenges, state funding decreases, cost-cutting opportunities, online education opportunities, racial justice, healing and dialogue. The new strategic plan, which included the update to “CADRE”, was launched in January 2021. The institution is in the process of determining assessment criteria of the new strategic plan. Implementation is also in process with a few challenges connected to funding and fiscal support for the plan as was noted during discussions with the institution’s leadership, strategic planning committee and board of trustees.

The mission and related statements identify the nature, scope and intended constituents of the higher education offerings and services the institution provides. Services were positively impacted by MSU Denver’s Educational and General Fund budget increase by \$25.3 million, or 16%, from fiscal year 2016-17 to fiscal year 2019-20. \$17.3 million was designated for instruction, academic support, student services and institutional scholarship. New revenue allocations for fiscal year 2019-20 provided \$1.9 million in additional funds to support high impact practices within the Peer Mentor Program and the Center for Advanced STEM, as well as institutional financial aid. Fiscal year 2020-21 saw a reduction in budget allocations due to the COVID-19 Global Pandemic.

MSU Denver's academic offerings, student support services and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission. As an example, the mission statement goal of “preparing students for a multicultural, global and technological society”, is supported by the institutions' General Studies program that includes student learning outcome requirements to complete courses designated as global and multicultural. The Global Diversity requirement can be met by taking one of 49 courses designated for the requirement. Approximately 8% of faculty include Service Learning course objectives and opportunities as part of their course curriculum.

MSU Denver’s mission statement and core values can be found on MSU Denver website and in print on campus. The university catalogs, the Board of Trustees governance policies, employee and student orientation materials, and curriculum manuals all include the mission and core value statements. MSU Denver’s mission and core values were placed physically on the third floor of the Student Success building occupied by the Provost, academic support and human resources. It was not observed in other physical buildings on campus or throughout the institution where students, faculty, staff and the general public gather. Access to the campus for the public, potential students and current students was limited due to the majority of staff and faculty operating the college from a distance (remote), including executive leadership. The shift to remote was due to COVID 19 pandemic institutional protocols.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

1.B - Core Component 1.B

The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.

1. The institution's actions and decisions demonstrate that its educational role is to serve the public, not solely the institution or any superordinate entity.
2. The institution's educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.
3. The institution engages with its external constituencies and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.

Rating

Met

Rationale

MSU Denver's educational role to serve the public is demonstrated through community partnerships as part of curricular and co-curricular programs that provide opportunities for students to engage and offer services to the community. Diversity and access as key components of these partnerships was expressed through multiple meetings during the accreditation visit and is articulated in the institution's core values. There is a clear emphasis and commitment to under-served students and the Denver urban community, which was underscored during meetings with the President, the Board of Trustees, faculty and staff as well as students.

Education focus is evidenced in MSU Denver's Strategic Plan 2030 which designates teaching and learning excellence as a foundational component. Student-Centered Academic Excellence, described in Pillar Two of the Strategic Plan, emphasizes providing "*rigorous and enriching learning experiences tailored to meet students where they are.*" Expansion of online education and master's level academic programs, as well as the common refrain heard in visit discussions that the university strives to engage students within the communities where they live and work, all speak to the institution's commitment to providing student-centered academic excellence.

Meetings with the president and members of the Board of Trustees, who are appointed by the Governor of Colorado, confirmed MSU Denver's independence from external influences such as financial investors or other entities.

MSU Denver's strategic plan first pillar, *Civic and Economic Catalyst*, provides evidence of the university's commitment to serving the City of Denver and the State of Colorado. Community partnerships include hotel and hospitality collaboration evidenced by the Hospitality Center, with the university issuing 2020 bonds to provide financial support for the center to be used for emergency housing by community members during the pandemic and the Hart Center for Public Service focusing on diversity in community leadership. Business partnerships with multiple aerospace companies have resulted in exceptional opportunities for hands on training with donated/sponsored specialized equipment in the Aviation, Aerospace and Engineering building, as seen during the

campus tour. These partnerships, with companies such as Lockheed Martin, Ratheyon, and United Airlines, also afford Aviation and Aerospace Science program students internships and job opportunities after graduation.

Academic and co-curricular programs engage the university and its students with the community. Examples include the academic departments of Music and Theatre and Dance which deliver public performances and educational outreach to k-12, the LGBTQ Student Resource Center support of community events such as the annual Pride Parade and AIDS walk, and the Urban Leadership Program that combines an academic minor with experiential learning opportunities in the community and mentorship. An example of diverse academic majors working together on a community project is the "*Veggie Box Project*", a collaboration of students from Industrial Design, Nutrition and Communication Design with Denver Botanic Gardens, food rescue organizations and neighbors from La Alma/Lincoln Park to develop a prototype of a "Little Free Library" for fresh fruits and vegetables in partnership with Denver Botanic Gardens and numerous food-rescue organizations. The impact of student engagement with the community is highlighted via the Student Impact and Innovation Showcase, where students give presentations on their experiences through internships, independent studies, and service-learning courses.

MSU Denver supports external constituencies by sharing resources and providing programming to the community. Examples include allowing the use of cutting-edge facilities like the Center for Advanced Visualization and Experiential Analysis with businesses and non-profit organizations; the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program, providing tax assistance to low-income households by student tax consultants; and the university's commitment to environmental sustainability as part of educational programming through the One World, Water Center and requiring new buildings to meet LEED certification.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

1.C - Core Component 1.C

The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

1. The institution encourages curricular or cocurricular activities that prepare students for informed citizenship and workplace success.
2. The institution's processes and activities demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations.
3. The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.

Rating

Met

Rationale

The institution's processes and activities demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations. The university was designated a Hispanic-Serving Institution status (having more than 25% of its population identifying as Latinx) in Spring 2019, serving more Latinx students than any other higher education institution in Colorado. The Student Success Center includes a designated HSI resource center. Over the past 5 years, the percentage of the undergraduate student population that is Hispanic or Latino has increased steadily from 41.1% in fall 2016 to 31.7% in fall 2020, while the percentage of other ethnic-minority groups has remained consistent over the same 5-year period. Goal 3 of Pillar IV of the Strategic Plan 2030 is to leverage and expand upon this HSI designation to become a national leader for serving the Latinx population. The HSI status also allows MSU Denver to apply for special federal grants directed to this population and receive priority points on other grant applications.

MSU Denver is recognized for its diversity and inclusion as evidenced by being a 7-time consecutive winner of the national Insight Into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award and its 4.5 out of 5-star rating on the Campus Pride Index. MSU Denver scored highly on most areas of inclusion for the LGBTQ community on the Index such as LGBTQ support and institutional commitment, campus safety, and recruitment & retention efforts for both faculty/staff and students.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion is active in providing programming for students as well as offering internal grants that allow faculty and staff to apply for funding to support diversity initiatives, both academic and co-curricular. Recent examples of grant funded programs include Contemporary Indian Print Makers, a Women in STEM conference, and Queer Faith. Twenty-six internal grants were awarded in 2017-2018, with an additional 30 in 2018-2019.

MSU Denver "Best Practices Guide for Faculty Searches" is an 83-page handbook, that includes strategies for increasing diversity in candidate pools as well as a section on Unconscious Bias, what it is/how to recognize it, how it can impact recruitment and how to overcome it in the search process.

However, discussion with faculty and staff found it is unclear how progress to increase diversity is being assessed. During the visit, some faculty suggested that diversity and inclusion for students is strongly supported by the university but expressed concerns about the campus climate and retention of diverse junior faculty.

During visit interviews the faculty expressed a passion and support for further advancing efforts in diversity, equity and inclusion. Progress has been made; however, faculty would like to see further progress in institutional initiatives for both internal and external stakeholders. DEI practices embedded within the institution's culture and systems have further work to be done to meet faculty goals and vision. These concerns are demonstrated by a resolution from the Faculty Senate in support of a diverse faculty, expressing concerns that budget cuts may result in a decrease in faculty of color and concerns that faculty of color are tenured at a lower rate than their white counterparts. The resolution requests more monitoring of faculty hiring and P&T practices. Recently President Davidson made a statement on June 3, 2020 committing the University to “*engage in the anti-racism work necessary to create change in our community*” and the Board of Trustees put forth a resolution on June 16th, 2020 stating the University’s “*commitment to engaging in the anti-racism work necessary to create systemic change*”.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

1.S - Criterion 1 - Summary

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

Rationale

MSU Denver has a clear, published mission statement, vision and core values and these are made publicly available through multiple publications. A review of the mission and core values began with the development of a new strategic plan in January 2019. In January 2020, a task force unveiled five pillars that would form the foundation of the Strategic Plan 2030. The pillars are *Civic and Economic Catalyst, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Agile and Sustainable, Student Access and Achievement, and Student-Centered Academic Excellence*.

Trends were discovered through this recent review of mission and core values including student enrollment fluctuations, competition challenges, funding decreases, cost-cutting opportunities, online education opportunities and racial justice. The new strategic plan, includes an update to "CADRE", launched in January 2021. Given the new refresh with the strategic plan and launching CADRE four months ago, there has not been time for the institution to determine assessment and evaluation of goals. The mission goals, vision and values have not been completely operationalized with adjustments for new strategic plan. The institution is in the process of determining assessment criteria of the new strategic plan. Implementation is also in process with challenges connected to state funding and fiscal support for the plan as discussed with the institution's leadership, strategic planning committee and Board of Trustees.

2 - Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

2.A - Core Component 2.A

The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.

1. The institution develops and the governing board adopts the mission.
2. The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, human resources and auxiliary functions.

Rating

Met

Rationale

The institution has established and follows policies and procedures to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff. MSU Denver has elected to solicit new auditors every year and demonstrates operations with integrity. This was evidenced by a review of several documents. Examples of documents reviewed included the Board of Trustee (BOT) Bylaws of 2021, MSU Denver website, and BOT Governance Statement for University Governance. Board of Trustees minutes both written, (BOT, 9-6-2020) and video/audio (BOT, 1-29-2021, 3-19-2021) provided additional support.

The Audited Financial Statements from FY2009 to FY2019 were reviewed from the Controller's link on the institution's webpage. In the BOT Financial Committee report dated 9/4/2020, the university faced a budget reduction of 16 million for FY2020 resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and additional related expenditures. The institution through aggressive budget management, further reduced the budget by 9.4 million. According to financial committee minutes, this was accomplished by decreasing 36 budgeted employed positions and 10 layoffs. In addition, the institution received 4.4 million in direct aid through the CARES act. An additional, one million in grants and 33.7 million from the state was allocated to compensate for decreases in funding to assist the institution in budget recovery (BOT minutes, 9/4/2020). These examples provide supporting evidence of the institution's ability to recover during challenging difficult times.

During FY 2013-FY 2016, there were significant audit findings related to Title IV Funds financial aid disbursement policies. Policies related to property management, financial, and capital assets were areas of previous audit findings. According to the audit statements from FY2009-FY 2019, there is evidence of the institutional commitment to clear up negative audit findings through internal policy development. Since FY 2017, there has been revised policies and no further mention of significant auditing concerns related to financial aid disbursement or Title IV funds. There is

consistency with recommendations from the external audit report for FY 2018 & FY 2019 related to information technology controls. As a result of the sensitive nature of the three audit findings, there were no written details or public disclosures. The institution also took steps to enhance the security of its' academic processes and procedures for the swift pivot to online operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, MSU Denver instituted privacy updates and security measures regarding its Canvas LMS, Banner system, and other online practices.

MSU Denver continues to maintain a publicly accessible website which communicates its mission, vision, and governance. A review of the most current 2030 strategic plan, policies, procedures, the Board of Trustees Bylaws, and full BOT committee minutes 9/4/2020 provide significant evidence of how the university mission is supported and threaded through the institution's programs and culture. The 2030 strategic plan was revised with the development of seven foundational pillars which was articulated by the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, and staff during the HLC virtual interviews. The institution has articulated this well through its website, printed materials, and community presence in Denver.

Since the last assurance argument in 2017, the institution has been guided by the mission and needs of its students and surrounding community. MSU Denver has developed multiple new graduate level and certificate programs resulting from community dialogue, needs assessment, and partnerships. Administrators and faculty confirmed during HLC virtual interviews that many of the choices for degree and certificate offerings are selected to support the Denver workforce. Examples include the approval of the Public Health, STEM path, and Cybersecurity certificate were approved at the BOT Full Board meeting (3-19-2021) and supported with communication from the Higher Learning Commission. (April 2019).

A review of the MSU Denver website, 2021 policy manuals including the Trustees Policy Manual, Faculty Employment Handbook, and the Colorado Classified Employee Handbook for classified employees, faculty, administrator, and staff provide a foundation for the various groups ethical responsibilities. In 2012, the institution under the State of Colorado revised the employee classification system. MSU Denver recognized the need for a new classification of employees who were not either faculty or administrators. An employee formed senate was established for shared governance for this group. These documents provide a foundation to guide the institution's fair and ethical responsibility and expectations of individuals employed and contracted by the institution. The human resources policies follow the Colorado Constitution (art. XII, §14) and the State Personnel System Act (C.R.S. §§24-50-101, et seq.) to guide human management and personnel. The institution supports staff personnel similarly to professional faculty with two senate committees for personnel to ensure shared governance.

Ethics and integrity for research are supported by the institution's Human Subject Protocol Plan. This requires all Human Research to undergo a review by the University's designated IRB prior to research. Activities that do not meet the definition of Human Research are not required for review and approval by the University's IRB.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

2.B - Core Component 2.B

The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public.

1. The institution ensures the accuracy of any representations it makes regarding academic offerings, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, governance structure and accreditation relationships.
2. The institution ensures evidence is available to support any claims it makes regarding its contributions to the educational experience through research, community engagement, experiential learning, religious or spiritual purpose and economic development.

Rating

Met

Rationale

MSU Denver has clearly and publicly communicated academic programs standards, requirements related to general admission, specialized degree, certification programs, costs, governance structure and institutional accreditation through its website, FY 2021 Catalog, and printed materials. Updated information related to academic program, degree requirements, and accreditation status were reviewed and located in the 2021 MSU Denver catalog and website. Individual specific program accreditation was found within the 2021 academic catalog. Financial statements, expenditures related to capital projects, wages, and the university budget were reviewed including BOT 2019-2021 financial committee minutes and FY 2009- FY2019 Audited Financial Statements as evidence.

MSU Denver's commitment to students is echoed in their vision and strategic plan. All students are provided an orientation to the university and program specific policies, academic policies, financial aid, and campus resources. Since the last assurance argument in 2017, the university has developed and enhanced its general education program. MSU Denver has communicated the revised general education program to public groups that may be impacted by the changes. Program specific policies and procedures can be found on the MSU Denver website and linked to each degree specific program. Catalogs from both the undergraduate and graduate programs including handbooks are easily accessible and available. Newly added degree additions have also been added to the online 2020-2021 catalogs. All catalogs are archived and can be found on the website as a reference for faculty, advisors, and students as historical support.

Faculty are required to schedule five office hours per week for student interaction or questions. The information regarding each department and faculty contact information is located on the institution's websites. Enrolled students provide evaluations of the instructor and course at the end of each semester. Assessment of the educational experience at MSU Denver is also collected via an alumni survey annually. Additionally, an overall student educational experience survey is conducted every two years.

MSU Denver has various advisory boards throughout the university to provide insight to student success, curriculum, professional programs, and relationship to contemporary practice. The advisory

groups and MSU Denver partnerships have been instrumental in the development of the most recent academic degree and certificate programs. For example, the Aviation and Aerospace Science program serves as one example of a program developed out of a partnership with such aerospace contractors as York Space Systems and aeronautical companies as Jeppesen-Boeing. Additional company partnerships have been publicly documented on the MSU Denver website. Contributions regarding research, community engagement and success are highlighted and presented in university community advisory meetings, in the RED institutional publication (Relevant Essential Denver publication) and shared at the Board of Trustees meetings. This information was publicly accessible for review within BOT public minutes FY 2017-FY 2021.

MSU Denver has several partnerships and articulation agreements with area community colleges and area high schools. The ASCENT (Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment) is a fifth-year high school program where students can take classes at MSU Denver tuition-free, though the success of the program was not clearly articulated during the HLC virtual visit. The university has an articulation agreement with Colorado Community Colleges. Specific programs such as Business, Arts, and Sciences serve as successful examples. Professional programs such as Nursing have transfer agreements for acceptable courses for continued matriculation at MSU Denver. The Articulation Agreements and Transfer Memorandum of Understanding are documented and published as the AA Articulation Agreement Policy within the University Policy Library.

The Student Government Association operates as the general voice of the students. There is evidence to support the students shared governance in several university minutes, particularly noted in the Board of Trustees presentations. There is one student representative elected annually on the Board of Trustees to represent the voice of the students. Per the current SGA president, the SGA constitution is currently being revised to better serve students.

The university ombudsman office previously available for students' complaints and concerns has been closed indefinitely due to cost reductions. Student issues and concerns are being redirected to Student Affairs as confirmed during virtual interviews. The university's commitment to provide support for students is evidenced by continuous wrap around services. Educational and financial advising, health services and counseling are currently provided both in-person on campus and remotely.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

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Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

2.C - Core Component 2.C

The governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution's integrity.

1. The governing board is trained and knowledgeable so that it makes informed decisions with respect to the institution's financial and academic policies and practices; the board meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
2. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.
3. The governing board reviews the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.
4. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties.
5. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the institution's administration and expects the institution's faculty to oversee academic matters.

Rating

Met

Rationale

According to the MSU Denver website and the Board of Trustees Bylaws, the BOT is responsible for the governance of the university and has the authority to control its assets and resources. The BOT consists of nine members appointed by the governor and three non-voting members who act in an advisory capacity to represent the faculty, student body and the Alumni association. The agenda and minutes of the public BOT meetings are publicly accessible and available for review on the institution's website.

The MSU Denver Board of Trustees receives annual training as required by the State of Colorado. The board is knowledgeable regarding the institution's need to make informed decisions. To remain current, Board of Trustees members regularly attend an Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges' events and programs. Day-to-day operations of the institution are delegated by the Board to the president and the president's administrative team. All trustees received periodic training that reinforces the oversight of role versus management. Each year by July 31st, trustees must file an acknowledged conflict of interest form related to personal, political, or financial interests. Evidence of the understanding of the financial state of the university and the fiduciary responsibility of the Board of Trustees was noted in a review of audio and video recordings of the full BOT meeting of 9/4/2020 and the annual meeting minutes of FY 2017-FY2021 full board meetings.

Full Board meetings occur several times per year, multiple committee meetings throughout the year, and one annual meeting in September. Committee meetings include special meetings related to the Executive Committee responsible for the Presidential evaluation, Finance, Governance, Academic Student Affairs, and Sustained Racial Justice.

The BOT has committed the institution to dismantling institutional racism by pledging to serve as a

leader to address racial justice on campus and at the city, state, national and global level. The BOT and the governing institution are committed to training, open discussions regarding racial bias and support people of color in positions of power and leadership. This resolution was noted as being in response to the need for systemic change, racial justice, and equity in within the campus community and America as a whole.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

2.D - Core Component 2.D

The institution is committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.

Rating

Met

Rationale

MSU Denver's BOT Freedom of Expression policy was approved and revised effective January 1, 2019. This policy supports the right of students and employees to assemble peacefully, communicate ideas freely, and allows for free expression to discuss any issue affecting the university community without fear of institutional discipline or retaliation. This free expression policy does not include expression not within the first amendment protection and rights of individuals.

In 2020, the Board of Trustees reaffirmed the policy regarding academic freedom. The revised Academic Freedom Policy now covers the rights of faculty, students, invited guests and staff who serve in an instructional role. The MSU Denver Academic Freedom Policy of 2020, supports the freedom to fully discuss academic subjects; engage in research and publish the results of research; and write or speak as citizens without fear of institutional censorship or discipline, providing that individuals do not represent themselves as writing or speaking for the University. Evidence for this policy was noted in the list of evidence documents, on the institution website, Faculty Senate documents, BOT 2020 Academic and Student Affairs Committee minutes, and within the University Policy Library.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

2.E - Core Component 2.E

The institution's policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, staff and students.

1. Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.
2. The institution provides effective support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff and students.
3. The institution provides students guidance in the ethics of research and use of information resources.
4. The institution enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

Rating

Met

Rationale

Professional standards are maintained through the institution's policies. The Intellectual Property Policy and a policy regarding ownership of materials were created in 2017 that stated the faculty content developed for online courses remained the property of the institution. In 2020, the increased development of online courses resulted in institutional policy revisions, allowing faculty to retain ownership of faculty developed intellectual property.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures the protection of human subjects included in research activities done by faculty and students. The IRB committee meets multiple times per year to review research applications, policies, and participate in related training, though no meeting minutes were provided or accessible. Faculty and students conducting research are required to complete human subject research training (CITI) and an approved IRB application prior to collecting data and research. The Human Research Protection Plan is located on the university web page to support and guide the behavior of faculty, staff and students related to human research.

Faculty are provided support for research and training through the Centers for Teaching Research and Design (CTRD).

Student scholarly activities and research is encouraged by the institution with the expectation that students will follow the same ethical academic conduct expected of faculty. The 2021 Student Code of Conduct and Academic Responsibilities policy provides rules and guidelines for students' academic freedom sanctions, violations of rules, and understanding plagiarism. Current policies prohibiting financial conflicts of interest for employees and students was also reviewed in the 2021 Student Handbook and website. Students involved in research must follow the same expectations as that of faculty and staff related to research and publishing. Students are provided support services for writing through the university Writing Center.

Policies related to plagiarism, research misconduct, and academic integrity are available online, in

the catalog, and faculty and student handbooks. Policies related to plagiarism and academic integrity are enforced by the Provost and President. Student violations of the student code of conduct are reported to the Dean of Students for review and sanctions. Faculty have the authority to issue grade sanctions and file an incident complaint with the Dean of Students related to academic misconduct, such as plagiarism and may issue a grade sanction of F.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

2.S - Criterion 2 - Summary

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

Rationale

MSU Denver's adherence to the principle of shared governance has proven to be the foundation that confirms the university is honorable and accountable in its conduct. Through shared governance, the university has in place all the necessary components for assuring the integrity of its operations, the ethical and fair treatment of all members of the university community, compliance with laws and regulations and embracing academic freedom. In general, policies and procedure are accessible and publicly articulated to communities of interest. MSU Denver students are given the knowledge, tools and mentor-ship they need to pursue their education successfully.

3 - Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support

The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

3.A - Core Component 3.A

The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education.

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of student performance appropriate to the credential awarded.
2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate and certificate programs.
3. The institution's program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).

Rating

Met

Rationale

MSU Denver is a comprehensive, urban, baccalaureate and master's degree granting university. The university programs are designed to accommodate students who work and attend school and return to the community. The mission is to provide high quality, educational programs that support the mission of the university and contributing to the lifelong learning multicultural global and technological society. This is evidenced by the multiple degree and certificate programs developed since the last assurance argument. In addition, the university has been recently designated a Hispanic Serving Institution in addition to its destination as a Minority Serving Institution.

There are currently 95 majors and 30 certificate programs which include undergraduate and graduate programs. The university has an option for students to design their own individualized degree program. They also offer context-specific degrees including aviation management, health care management, meteorology and integrative healthcare. MSU Denver offers 8 Masters degrees, seven certificates, and two practice opportunities at the graduate level.

The *Curriculum Manual for Undergraduate Studies* and the *Graduate Curriculum Guidelines* provide policies for a robust curriculum development process that starts with faculty in academic departments. Every seven years, with three 2-year program progress reports in between, academic departments complete an Academic Program Review that includes an external reviewer and review of: curriculum, assessment, faculty, and students. Many academic programs hold specialized accreditation and at least 21 programs have advisory boards, both contributing to design and assessment of appropriate levels of student performance for credentials awarded.

The 2-Year Program Progress Report templates require that units clearly articulate the student learning outcomes associated with each degree program. That being said, and although it is not required, it is suggested that the university publish the student learning outcomes for each program in a public place (catalog or website), as students should be aware of the learning outcomes.

Degree programs are reviewed once every seven years; approval of new programs as well as the discontinuation of programs follow the policy and procedures of the university and receive final approval by the Board of Trustees.

Reviewers inspected multiple syllabi for courses offered in alternative locations and modalities. All course descriptions and learning objectives remained parallel across the syllabi.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

3.B - Core Component 3.B

The institution offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings and degree levels of the institution. The institution articulates the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.
2. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.
3. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity and provides students with growth opportunities and lifelong skills to live and work in a multicultural world.
4. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their offerings and the institution's mission.

Rating

Met

Rationale

After its historical difficulties with clearly articulating its general education curriculum, MSU Denver has done a impressive job of iteratively designing the general education curriculum in a scholarly based, inclusive, and data driven manner. The current general education program was first developed in 2012 and then the revised in 2019. Revisions were made based on the review of the program. Revisions included both curricular revisions as well as support documentation to help students and faculty understand different components of the program. The revised general education curriculum appears more focused and clearly articulated, which benefits both faculty and students. The revised general education curriculum is clearly articulated on the website and in the catalog.

MSU Denver's General Education tri-part program prompts students to further develop foundational skills (writing, oral communication, and quantitative literacy), discover and understand disciplinary frameworks (natural and physical sciences, social and behavioral sciences, arts and humanities, and history), and finally emphasize diverse perspective taking with required courses that highlight global diversity and multiculturalism.

Besides MSU Denver's renewed dedication to a liberal arts education, as articulated by their 2020 resolution, MSU Denver has a commitment to human and cultural diversity as evidenced by their multicultural and global diversity general education requirements. In continuing to improve these requirements, the institution provides opportunities for faculty to meet, discuss, and promote continuous curricular improvement.

The campus also shows its dedication to diversity, inclusion, and equity through dedicated spaces and units that support students and faculty of color and other minority groups. During campus meetings a number of different units shared descriptions of programs that support diverse and traditionally underserved populations. MSU Denver continues to support their study abroad program with a focus on supporting the opportunity for minority and low income students to participate.

Beyond the scholarship and creative work that category I (tenured and tenure-track) faculty produce, MSU Denver supports a robust intellectual environment for students to produce scholarly and creative work as well. Beyond specific initiatives like Met Media, *Metrosphere*, *The Metropolitan*, and the Undergraduate Research Program, the required undergraduate Senior Experience course provides undergraduates with a multitude of support production environments.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

3.C - Core Component 3.C

The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

1. The institution strives to ensure that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.
2. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance, assessment of student learning, and establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff.
3. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual and consortial offerings.
4. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
5. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.
6. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
7. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising and cocurricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their professional development.

Rating

Met With Concerns

Rationale

MSU Denver has a diverse composition of staff that support the mission of the institution through teaching, scholarship and service. The diversity of the organization is evidenced by the diversity of the faculty, staff, and its student populations. MSU Denver institutionalizes its commitment to diversity through codified values, resolutions, policies, and practices for recruiting, hiring, and supporting faculty, staff, and students. In addition, the organization was previously designated a Minority Serving Institution and most recently received the designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution. MSU Denver has committed to increased diversity. According to faculty during virtual interviews, the university has tried to recruit to increase faculty diversity, but have been unable to retain diverse, qualified faculty due to salaries and climate.

With the increasing in degree offerings, it is a positive that there has been an increase of full-time faculty over the past five years (from 517 to 581). The *Curriculum Manual for Undergraduate Studies*, the *Graduate Curriculum Guidelines* document, and the *Faculty Employment Handbook* all outline policies and procedures for the faculty-led development and assessment of curriculum as well as articulation of credentials for instructional staff.

The Faculty Employment Handbook outlines the general academic credentials required of instructional staff, leaving any "testing" requirements for someone who does not have the academic

credentials but has other equivalent experiences to the faculty of each department. Departments like Music have robust guidelines for assessing equivalent experiences and, according to the Concurrent Enrollment Manager, dual credit partners use the same guidelines as the campus for hiring instructors. However, Human Resources did not have a well organized system for systematically verifying employee's current assignments with documentation of appropriate qualifications.

In October, 2020, changes were made to the *Faculty Employment Handbook*, that helped to better streamline evaluation and appeals processes. These changes were drafted by a committee comprised of representation from Faculty Senate, Chairs, Deans, Human Resources, the Provost's Office and Legal Counsel. The *Faculty Employment Handbook* outlines in detail the evaluation processes for Category I, II, and III faculty including common instruments like professional portfolios, peer observations, and student evaluations. Tenured faculty also participate in a post-tenure review every five years.

The Center for Teaching, Learning and Design (CTLD) provides a variety of opportunities for faculty to continue professionally growing as instructors, including two major events:

1. Teaching and Learning with Technology Symposium, a long-running event that has drawn participants from all over Colorado; and
2. Tri-Institutional Faculty Forum, in which MSU Denver, CU Denver and Community College of Denver collaborate.

Category I, Tenured and Tenure-Track, faculty have sabbatical as an opportunity to continue their professional growth within their discipline. There was not clear evidence of how the institution supports the consistent continual disciplinary professional growth of category II and III faculty.

Students are readily able to contact faculty. The MSU Denver website provides contact information for all faculty and staff. All tenured and tenure-track faculty at MSU Denver are required to establish, post and keep five hours of office hours per week during the semester per the *Faculty Employment Handbook*. In addition, some full-time lecturers, known as Category II faculty, are also required to keep office hours as a condition of their employment. Some department handbooks provide more detailed requirements for faculty regarding office hours and facilitating advising sessions.

Student support staff members generally require a combination of minimum academic degrees and continued professional growth activities. The assurance report shared details about the minimum requirements of staff hired in the Writing Center and Financial Aid. There is evidence of a robust climate of collaboration and collegiality as a form of professional support and continued growth. As discussed and shared during one of the campus meetings, all academic and student affairs units provide a variety of official and unofficial methods for staff member's continued professional growth. For example:

- MSU Denver has a site license for faculty, staff, and student to access LinkedIn Learning;
- Many units allocate budget each year for staff development, HR offers a variety of events and activities, and the university offers employee tuition credit.
- Many units (e.g., Advancement, Facilities, HR, Orientation, Transition & Retention) purchase memberships to professional organizations that allow staff to participate in different types of professional growth.
- Many units (e.g., HR, Advising, Student Affairs, TRIO, and Athletics) organize a variety of casual to more formal opportunities like sharing in regular meeting, offering monthly/quarterly meetings/trainings, and planning retreats.

- The university also started a *Roadrunners Taking Care of You* group on Teams that is open to all staff to participate in general and specific conversations with each other to encourage work/life balance and provide resources to support personal and professional growth

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

One of the primary purposes for an accreditation evaluation and visit is to ensure that the faculty and staff are qualified to do the work expected of the university as defined by its mission. During the visit, the on-site team member was scheduled to do a review of faculty credentials in person in the Human Resources office, but upon arrival, the HR director was not prepared for our visit and as a result, a proper review was not possible. During conversations with department chairs during the visit, it was unclear if there are standard procedures for evaluating faculty qualifications across departments. After the visit, a sample of 26 faculty member names was provided to the ALO and copies of their transcripts were posted in the Addendum for review.

Of 26 faculty member credentials (transcripts) reviewed, six (23%) of the faculty did not meet the basic HLC qualification requirements for teaching the level of courses they were assigned.

Per the document "Determining Qualified Faculty Through HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices-Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers, pages 3 and 4:

"..faculty teaching in undergraduate programs should hold a degree at least one level above that of the program in which they are teaching. If a faculty member holds a master's degree or higher in a discipline other than that in which he or she is teaching, that faculty member should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline in which he or she is teaching.

Faculty teaching in graduate programs should hold the terminal degree determined by the discipline and have a record of research, scholarship or achievement appropriate for the graduate program.

MSU Denver needs to develop and implement a streamlined, most likely digital, system for tracking faculty hiring and qualification checks. In other words, what is a faculty member teaching any given semester, how are they qualified to be teaching the course, and how does the institution systematically check and update this information? This information needs to be housed in a centralized place, likely HR.

The peer review teams suggests that MSU Denver review the qualifications of all full- and part-time faculty within the next six months. For any faculty who is not qualified based on academic degree requirements, a formal process for the examination and documentation of appropriate tested experience should be put into place. Any faculty who do not meet either the academic requirements or tested experience requirements should have a professional development plan documented with a timeline as to when they will meet the minimal requirements with 2 years.

3.D - Core Component 3.D

The institution provides support for student learning and resources for effective teaching.

1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its offerings and the needs of its students.
4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites and museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).

Rating

Met

Rationale

The institution has a number of services to support the institutions mission. In 2018, a new Student Affairs branch was added to the organizations infrastructure by the current president. A new executive vice president was hired to head this new division prioritizing MSU Denver's specific student population. The revised strategic plan, the development of the new Student Affairs division, and review of the website are supporting evidence for the newly revised vision and the student-centered prioritization of the institution.

By initiating a Student Affairs branch in 2018, MSU Denver has demonstrated a strong commitment to providing various student support initiatives. MSU Denver provides a variety of support that acknowledges the whole student, inside and outside the classroom and campus. They offer academic support services like TRIO SSS, Supplemental Instruction, Tutoring, Writing Center, and Access Center. They also offer more broad support services like: the Classroom to Career Hub, Transfer Student Success, Campus Recreation, and the Veteran & Military Student Services Center. Finally, MSU Denver also includes outreach programs like Excel and College Works. MSU Denver also provides varied online onboarding support for students enrolled in solely online programs that include both institutional wide resources as well as instructions for how instructors should support student in individual courses. The varied services help support the broad spectrum of students attending MSU Denver and studying a wide range of disciplines and professions.

Besides offering robust academic and student services, MSU Denver's Orientation, Transition, and Retention (OTR) office provides support for incoming students. They have both more orientations for more traditional college aged students as well as the Transfer Student Success office to better support the different needs of transfer students. Online degree programs also provide orientation offerings for online students.

MSU Denver has been working to continuously improve their academic advising, especially by streamlining some of the hiring, training, and assessment of the distributed advisors found in different units. All of the student affairs units have continued to collect data, especially from students, and revised their offerings accordingly. Even before the pandemic, most offices were providing a wider range of services as well as modalities and mechanisms for accessing service.

MSU Denver provides a variety of material and technological infrastructure to support their academic mission. Classrooms provide basic hardware and technological materials for student engagement. The centralized IT and pedagogical support (CTLD) units support faculty and students with hardware, software, connectivity, and training. The LGBTQ Student Resource Center as well as the Gender Institute for Teaching and Advocacy supplement the institutionally shared Auraria Library with over 1,700 books and videos.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

3.S - Criterion 3 - Summary

The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

Rationale

MSU Denver provides a high quality educational experience that is focused on supporting their specific student population. To meet the regional needs as well as the desires of MSU Denver's student population, the number of degree and certificate offerings has rapidly expanded. The General Education curriculum is well designed and assessed and appropriate to the institutional mission and student population. The institution emphasizes the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusivity as evidenced by their general education curriculum as well as their robust academic and student support services and specialized programs. Policies describe and practices confirm the hiring and continued support of qualified faculty and staff.

Although degree program student learning outcomes are clearly articulated in the 2-Year Program Progress Report template, it is suggested that MSU Denver publicly share this information with students and other stakeholders.

Within 24 months, MSU Denver will need to provide an interim report describing evidence of systematic mechanisms for documenting and tracking faculty assignments and appropriate qualifications.

4 - Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

4.A - Core Component 4.A

The institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings.
2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.
3. The institution has policies that ensure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It ensures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution ensures that the credentials it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission.

Rating

Met

Rationale

In April of 2019, the institution redesigned its academic program review process approved by the Office of Academic Affairs. The institution appears to have a regular practice of program reviews. The Academic Program Review Committee (APRC), which is faculty led, consists of a Program Review Manager, one faculty associate, and eight representatives from the academic colleges. Programs are reviewed every seven years with progress reports completed on a two-year cycle between reviews. This rigorous process includes a self-study narrative and a review conducted by an external consultant approved by the dean or director's office. Final results of the program reviews are shared with the Board of Trustees.

The institution has processes and procedures in place to evaluate all academic credit it awards. The procedures include evaluation of transcripts for prior credit/learning, evaluation of AP, CLEP, IB and

military documents and established articulation agreements previously approved. To ensure timely and consistent awarding of credits, course equivalencies have been made available to prospective students in the transfer credit portal. Found on the institution's website, this portal simplifies the transfer process for students who are planning future semesters. Prospective students are also given the option to speak with a transfer counselor if questions or concerns arise during the process.

To ensure incoming credits meet the institution's standards, strict transfer guidelines are published in the catalog on the institution's website. A state-wide articulation agreement exists in specific disciplines. This agreement creates a seamless transition for community college students seeking to enroll at MSU Denver.

As it relates to accreditation of specific and specialized programs, the institution maintains accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its purposes. Many programs have earned specialized accreditations. The list of programs can be found on the institution's website in the undergraduate/graduate catalog and the individual department pages.

Success of its students tracked through a post graduate outcomes survey. This survey is sent to students six months after graduation. Data collected includes employment status, educational pursuits, salaries and industries of employment. This survey allows the institution to see the relationship between specific majors and occupations. Another tool for success utilized is the survey of undergraduate students who pursue graduate degrees, certificates or any form of post baccalaureate work.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

4.B - Core Component 4.B

The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.

1. The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings.
2. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
3. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, instructional and other relevant staff members.

Rating

Met

Rationale

The institution has made a concerted effort of assessing its general studies programs. Beginning in 2019, the institution redesigned its general studies and instituted new student learning outcomes. This process involved all faculty engaged in teaching general studies courses, the general studies advisory board and part-time faculty who make up more than 50% of the instructors of general studies courses. Workshops were held for all involved. These workshops covered 1) identifying key assignments, using rubrics, and data reflection/analysis. As a result of these efforts, the general studies learning outcomes were revised.

It appears the institution is moving forward with assessing cocurricular activities. The report identified one specific area where cocurricular assessment is taking place (TRIO SSS) while efforts to increase awareness of cocurricular assessment is in progress. Student affairs staff have engaged in activities to increase knowledge of cocurricular assessment including pre-workshop surveys, post workshop surveys, cross-departmental collaboration, data collection and reviews. Some of the data collected from student surveys showed students had concerns with finding classes that accommodated their work schedule and not enough courses being scheduled to meet their needs. No information was included in the report on how the institution used the data collected such as if classes added or if accommodations were added to meet schedule needs of students. Fortunately, the institution did report findings in other areas and how results were used which included the types of outreach needed for future programming during summer and fall semesters.

The assessment of student learning reflects good practice by the institution. A timeline was provided which shows the process in which program reviews take place over the course of three semesters. Involved in the process are data managers, the APRC committee, program chairs, an external reviewer, deans, and the provost. Updates are also provided to the Board during this process. Although this appeared to be a robust process, the review team noted some inconsistencies and institutional oversight in some areas related to the assessment of student learning outcomes. For example; the section of the Addendum report which discusses psychology indicates there is a BS and a BA in one area; however, the report focused mostly on the BS degree. Other examples included the

human service and counseling program which has three degrees and six concentrations. The report only shows the MS degree's goals and not outcomes of student learning.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

4.C - Core Component 4.C

The institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence and completion that are ambitious, attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Rating

Met

Rationale

The institution has identified goals for student retention, persistence and completion. As a part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the institution developed the Enrollment Command Center (ECC) in 2020. This center provides command of enrollment management, coordination and makes decisions that support recruiting and retention efforts. Made up of individuals representing admissions, registrar, academic affairs and student affairs, the ECC collaborates with both internal and external constitutions to support the institution's mission, student populations and academic offerings and also centers diverse students and the HSI mission as a priority.

The institution has collected data and analyzes the information on retention, persistence and completion. Goals for improvement include: increase engagement in recruiting so that all are involved; assess current enrollment trends; and increase college-wide collaboration as it relates to recruitment, retention and increasing diversity among students. The newly developed Enrollment Command Center was established as a group whose focus is overall enrollment, recruitment and retention. Institution-wide collaboration appears to be a key part of this process.

A central figure in student retention and persistence is the Office of Institutional Research. This office gathers data related to student retention and graduation rates and much more, then shares this information to the campus and the general public (institutional Research Data Book found on the institution's website). Also used to measure the institution's retention and graduation rates are metrics set by the Board of Trustees and by the State of Colorado Department of Higher Education's Performance Contract. Performance goals of the institution are measured utilizing these tools.

Information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs was used by the institution to make improvements. This practice has occurred since 2010 and includes surveys of students, surveys of faculty advisors and professional advisors and a survey of students who stopped out of the institution. Moving forward, the survey of students' experiences will be tracked every two years. Changes to enhance the student experience are in progress and will continue. Of importance to note is the Early Alert program in place which monitors first year students, new transfer students and other populations. Results of this program inform the work of Student Intervention Services, a unit that works with students whose cumulative GPA falls below a 2.0 and students who are in danger of suspension.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

4.S - Criterion 4 - Summary

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Rationale

Previous reviews resulted in actions related to insufficient assessment of programs. MSU Denver has made a concerted effort at enhancing its program review process specifically for general education studies. This process involves faculty, staff, administrators, external constituents and the Board of Trustees but is facilitated by the faculty led Academic Program Review Committee. Program reviews are conducted every seven years with two-year program progress reports designed to help with continuous improvement. Cocurricular assessment activities appear to be moving forward due to increased awareness of the need.

5 - Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

The institution's resources, structures, processes and planning are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

5.A - Core Component 5.A

Through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution's leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission.

1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.
2. The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.
3. The institution's administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.

Rating

Met

Rationale

MSU Denver defines the shared governance through a constellation structure that allows faculty, staff, and students to initiate and participate in decision-making processes. Faculty Senate, Staff Senate and Student Government Assembly are comprised of elected members. Group members can join the online meetings or reach their senators via the links provided on webpages to make recommendations or propose changes on current policies. Head leaders of these groups serve on the President's Cabinet together with vice presidents, other administrators and advisors. The president takes the cabinet's recommendations on policy issues to the Board of Trustees for final approval. The board consists of nine members appointed by the governor and three non-voting members representing faculty, students, and the alumni association.

During one of the meetings, the reviewers were told MSU Denver's shared governance process collaboratively researches and proposes actions to the upper administration who then makes final decisions. This is evidenced in the university planning and budgeting processes. Additionally, Staff Senate recently began representing student employees. Both staff and student representatives serve on the Budget Recommendation Committee.

In 2015, the university launched the Business Intelligence unit to streamline the process of translating data into information and support campus decision-makers with quick summaries of data. IR and Enterprise Data Warehouse units also answer to campus data needs. The descriptive and

analytical results have assisted the administrators at different levels to monitoring enrollment, course-taking, finance, and make informed decisions. One example is that the university gradually ended a tuition policy that allowed students to pay for 12 credit hours and take up to 6 extra credit hours for free. The policy intended to incentivize at-risk students, such as low-income students, to take more hours per semester and accelerate graduation. The data analysis showed the key users of the policy were full-time dependent students who often came from stronger financial backgrounds, while part-time students with high work hours and family responsibilities were not able to take more hours. The university decided to end the policy and move the resources to other student service programs. Another example provided at the interview meeting is that the university turned down the offer to take over another campus property which would have led to increased costs not covered by projected increased revenues. Other examples of using qualitative data, surveys, and institutional data to support decision-making in various units, such as Admission, Diversity, HR, and Alumni, were shared at the Unit Leader meeting. The university has begun to provide training for unit leaders to design and implement assessment processes and data-driven decision making.

As the head of the IR office prepares to retire, the Business Intelligence and IR units will merge. The BI unit has evolved from providing descriptive analysis to building prediction models, and developed mechanism to solicit and answer campus-wide data curiosities. The number of answered data requests increased from 150 to 241 over one year. The BI unit was involved early in the strategic planning process to help identify measurable outcomes, collect data, and build metrics.

Faculty Senate represents faculty members and has the principle jurisdiction over curriculum, tenure and promotion. Faculty Senate has twelve subcommittees, including academic policies, curriculum and general studies. At these subcommittees, staff and students representatives serve as Ex Officio members. Faculty, as members of their academic units, also participate in curriculum development and revision through the program review process. Student participation in the program review and curriculum revision processes is mainly through capstone courses and senior exit surveys.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

5.B - Core Component 5.B

The institution's resource base supports its educational offerings and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

1. The institution has qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. The goals incorporated into the mission and any related statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources and opportunities.
3. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring its finances.
4. The institution's fiscal allocations ensure that its educational purposes are achieved.

Rating

Met

Rationale

MSU Denver has policies in place for qualifications and hiring process for faculty and staff. The minimum qualifications for instructional faculty are published on the webpage of the Policy Library. The recruitment and appointment policy was updated in 2021. Human Resources collaborates with the Equal Employment Opportunity Office to facilitate searching and hiring processes with guidelines and best practices.

The university provides a variety of programs for employee learning and development. It partners with Academic Impress, a company that provides professional training for faculty and staff in higher education. Employees also have access to LinkedIn Learning, an on-demand library of webinars on business skills. Faculty members have up to \$1,500 and staff are allotted \$750 annually for professional development. When asked if they have taken advantage of the professional development support, many unit leaders shared experiences of attending national conferences, participating in continued education, and holding group membership with professional organizations which provide training sessions, etc.

The office of Operations, IT, and Finance have both strategic and ad hoc processes for planning and managing infrastructural development and maintenance. The IR, BI, and Enterprise Data Warehouse units and other key data users created the Data Governance and Knowledge Management Committee to enhance data integrity, meet compliance, and coordinate work efforts.

The goals of the Strategic Plan 2030 are aligned with the mission of the university. However, as the plan was launched in January 2021, the university is still developing the implementation plan where concrete goals and performance metrics are set for each action. Campus groups have taken ownership over different parts of the plan, such as Enrollment Management, Advancement, and Diversity and Inclusion. A couple of informal goals were shared at the meeting, for example, to increase the number of industry partnership from 1000 to 8000 by 2030, and for 100% of graduates either be continuing their education or employed within 6 months after graduation.

At the end of each calendar year, the Budget Office sends out a budget request form to each branch unit. The branch units return the forms in mid February, then the Budget Recommendation Committee (BRC) compiles the requests and starts to meet. The BRC reviews the relevant data, such as enrollment and credit hour production, and discusses the requests. The meeting minutes and key points are communicated to the campus through Early Bird, a required campus reading. The BRC makes budget recommendations to the president in mid April, and then the president submits the recommendations to the Board of Trustees in late April. The Board of Trustees starts to meet in May. The BRC recap and presentation slides can be found at the webpage of Early Bird. The BRC is a large, representative group that provides a mechanism for shared governance within the budget planning process.

MSU Denver maintains healthy finance via prudent spending and agile budgeting. In FY2020-21, the university reduced the budget by \$9.3 million in permanent base by eliminating positions and layoffs, as well as reducing travel, events, and other operating budgets. Another \$3.2 million was saved from voluntary and tiered mandatory furloughs which limited the impact on the employees with lowest income. On the other hand, the university redirected resources to bridge financial gaps for students by increasing financial aid by \$680,000, reducing student fee structure, leveraging the University MSI CARES Grant, and developing more open educational resources. The increased financial aid was confirmed during the interview session with students.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

5.C - Core Component 5.C

The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities, including, as applicable, its comprehensive research enterprise, associated institutes and affiliated centers.
2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity, including fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue and enrollment.
5. Institutional planning anticipates evolving external factors, such as technology advancements, demographic shifts, globalization, the economy and state support.
6. The institution implements its plans to systematically improve its operations and student outcomes.

Rating

Met

Rationale

Under the leadership of the new President, MSU Denver has a strong focus on offering cohesive student-centered education and services for a diverse student population. Most of their decisions connect back to the focus. From FY17 to FY20, MSU Denver increased the Educational and General Fund budget by 16% (\$25,363,385). Out of the total increase, 59% was invested in instruction, academic support, student services, and institutional scholarship. During the same period, the university managed to increase the tuition by 4.6%. The budgeting process goes through the vetting process where the budget request alignment with university priorities and mission is explicitly checked at branch and Budget Recommendation Committee.

The planning process engaged internal constituents including students, faculty, staff, alumni and external stakeholder groups of Community Cabinet, Foundation Board, Board of Trustees and industry partners through 52 focus group meetings and ten town halls. The chair of the Strategic Planning Team (SPT) confirmed at the interview meeting that nearly 2000 people were engaged in the planning process.

Additionally, the SPT, a 25-member team, made field trips (both physical and virtual) to peer institutions to experience best practices. A consultant was hired to provide independent perspective and support the process. A renowned state demographer was invited to the campus to share recent research findings on demographic trends at state and national levels. The planning process paused on April 2020 due to the pandemic. Under the guidance of the consultant, the SPT practiced alternative post-pandemic scenarios and confirmed the planning trajectories for the university.

The university staff keep abreast of the reported trends in higher education demographics, economy,

political and technological environments. It retains a legislative liaison to monitor state and federal legislative activities. The liaison works with the university budget team to keep the Board of Trustees updated.

MSU Denver's Strategic Plan was launched in January 2021. By the time of the virtual site visit in April, the university was still in the process of developing the implementation plan. The Pillar V's implementation plan with strategies to set baselines, KPIs, and goals was shared by request. The SPT chair indicated each pillar has a leader in charge of developing the implementation plan. The goal is to finalize and share the overall university implementation plan with the Board of Trustees by December 2021. The dashboard of accomplishments will be posted on MSU Denver's internal network. The conversation with unit leaders, such as Alumni, Diversity and Inclusion, and Admission, confirmed that they are at different stages of developing the implementation plan.

Multiple examples demonstrated the evaluation of operation is linked to planning and budgeting. During the pandemic, Student Affairs administered surveys to check student well-being and access to technology or equipment. Before the pandemic, focus group meetings and the campus climate survey were administered to identify the needs of specific groups of students. When data showed students and their families were overwhelmed by the information provided on one-day orientation, the Admission moved part of the orientation to online, then focused the day program on growing the sense of belong with other students. The Classroom to Career Hub (C2 Hub), the career service program connecting students, peer mentors, faculty, staff, and industry partners, was created based on the evaluation of student employment experiences.

The Academic Program Review process was redesigned in April 2019 with a 2-Year Program Progress Report added to the cycle in addition to the one-year follow-up after the review. The progress report asks for the updated assessment data, program initiatives, and if additional resource is needed to accomplish the initiatives. A completed progress report of Modern Language B.A. is provided as an example showing the assessment of learning is linked to planning and budgeting. At the interview meeting, more examples of assessment data leading to curriculum changes were provided.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

5.S - Criterion 5 - Summary

The institution's resources, structures, processes and planning are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Rationale

MSU Denver has well-established structure and process for staff recruitment, professional development, data collection and usage, budgeting and planning. The university closely monitors its finance and explicitly aligns resource allocation with its mission and priorities. Faculty, staff, and students have chances to participate in planning and budgeting process through various designed venues. Ample examples of using data to inform decision-making and improve operation have been found.

The university collected a large amount of data to form the foundation for the Strategic Plan 2030 with a clear awareness of possible demographic, political, and technology challenges in the future. Given that the new plan was launched in January 2021, the university is still developing an implementation plan with concrete goals and performance measures.

Review Dashboard

Number	Title	Rating
1	Mission	
1.A	Core Component 1.A	Met
1.B	Core Component 1.B	Met
1.C	Core Component 1.C	Met
1.S	Criterion 1 - Summary	
2	Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct	
2.A	Core Component 2.A	Met
2.B	Core Component 2.B	Met
2.C	Core Component 2.C	Met
2.D	Core Component 2.D	Met
2.E	Core Component 2.E	Met
2.S	Criterion 2 - Summary	
3	Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support	
3.A	Core Component 3.A	Met
3.B	Core Component 3.B	Met
3.C	Core Component 3.C	Met With Concerns
3.D	Core Component 3.D	Met
3.S	Criterion 3 - Summary	
4	Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement	
4.A	Core Component 4.A	Met
4.B	Core Component 4.B	Met
4.C	Core Component 4.C	Met
4.S	Criterion 4 - Summary	
5	Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning	
5.A	Core Component 5.A	Met
5.B	Core Component 5.B	Met
5.C	Core Component 5.C	Met
5.S	Criterion 5 - Summary	

Review Summary

Interim Report(s) Required

Due Date

7/1/2022

Report Focus

MSU Denver is review the qualifications of all full- and part-time faculty within the next six months. For any faculty who is not qualified based on academic degree requirements, a formal process for the examination and documentation of appropriate tested experience should be put into place. Faculty who do not meet either the academic requirements or tested experience requirements should have a professional development plan documented with a timeline as to when they will meet the minimal requirements with 2 years.

An interim report due July 1, 2022 that describes the policies and procedures put into place to systematically document and track faculty qualifications including tested experience and provide evidence that all faculty met HLC minimal faculty qualifications for the courses they are assigned to teach. Those faculty who do not meet the minimal requirements must a documented professional development plan to meet the minimal qualifications by July 1, 2023.

Conclusion

Metropolitan State University – Denver is a university whose mission is to serve its community and provide a gateway of opportunity for underserved populations who would otherwise not have the opportunity to earn a college degree. Through strong shared governance, current policies and procedures, growth in academic programs and a well thought through strategic plan, MSU Denver delivers on its mission to provide an enriched educational environment for a very diverse population.

Since the last review, MSU Denver has made significant strides in the assessment of its general education program and is commended for those efforts.

With the rapid growth of academic programs, especially at the graduate level, it is essential that MSU Denver make a concerted effort to centralize the tracking and monitoring of faculty qualifications. It is of serious concern that almost 1/4th of the faculty credentials reviewed did not meet minimal HLC qualifications.

In general, many of MSU Denver's policies and procedures were found to be decentralized, such as the tracking and monitoring of faculty qualifications, and it is recommended that leadership reconsider this model and move toward more centralization of critical policies and procedures that are applicable across departments.

Although it is not required for HLC accreditation, it is recommended that MSU Denver be transparent with program level student learning outcomes by publishing them in the course catalog, rather than only including them in internal documents (the 2-year program review reports). This would ensure students and other stakeholders know what to expect when pursuing a specific degree from the institution.

Finally, the peer review team felt the university was unprepared for the actual site visit. Examples include the HR department not being informed/prepared to provide a sample of faculty credentials, the lack of considerations for the

onsite reviewer (no lunch provided no interaction with the executive leadership team on campus, difficulty in leaving the campus office provided as she was locked out of the area after leaving once, etc.), the student session being populated with just 5 students, 4 of which were student workers within executive team offices, and seemingly little knowledge of the purpose of the visit by participants in many of the virtual sessions. This lack of preparedness left the team with a sense that the university leadership may not take HLC accreditation as seriously as it should.

Overall Recommendations

Criteria For Accreditation

Met With Concerns

Sanctions Recommendation

No Sanction

Pathways Recommendation

Limited to Standard



Institutional Status and Requirements Worksheet

INSTITUTION and STATE:	Metropolitan State University of Denver, CO
TYPE OF REVIEW:	Standard Pathway Comprehensive Evaluation
DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW:	Year 4 Comprehensive Evaluation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only the following will travel to campus: Kathy Kiser-Miller. The rest of the team will conduct the evaluation remotely.
DATES OF REVIEW:	4/26/2021 - 4/27/2021
<input type="checkbox"/> No Change in Institutional Status and Requirements	

Accreditation Status

Nature of Institution

Control: Public

Recommended Change: No Change

Degrees Awarded: Bachelors, Masters

Recommended Change: No Change

Reaffirmation of Accreditation:

Year of Last Reaffirmation of Accreditation: 2016 - 2017

Year of Next Reaffirmation of Accreditation: 2026 - 2027

Recommended Change: No Change

Accreditation Stipulations

General:

The institution is approved at the following program level(s): Bachelor's, Master's

The institution is not approved at the following program level(s): Associate's, Specialist, Doctoral

The institution is limited to offer the following program(s), within the approved program levels listed above: Master of Social Work, Master of Professional Accountancy, Master of Arts in Teacher Education with concentrations in Special Education and Elementary Education, Master of Business Administration, Master of Health Administration, Master of Science in Cybersecurity, Master of Science in Human Nutrition and Dietetics, and Master of Science in Clinical Behavioral Health with an emphasis in Addictions Counseling



Institutional Status and Requirements Worksheet

Recommended Change: No Change

Additional Location:

Prior HLC approval required.

Recommended Change: No Change

Distance and Correspondence Courses and Programs:

Approved for distance education courses and programs. Approved for correspondence education courses and programs.

Recommended Change: No Change

Accreditation Events

Accreditation Pathway

Standard Pathway

Recommended Change: No Change

Upcoming Events

Comprehensive Evaluation: 2026 - 2027

Recommended Change: No Change

Monitoring

Upcoming Events

None

Recommended Change: A Monitoring Report due July 1, 2022 that describes the policies and procedures put into place to systematically document and track faculty qualifications including tested experience and provide evidence that all faculty met HLC minimal faculty qualifications for the courses they are assigned to teach.

Institutional Data

Educational Programs

Recommended
Change:

Undergraduate

Certificate

37

Associate Degrees

0



Institutional Status and Requirements Worksheet

Baccalaureate Degrees	95	_____
Graduate		
Master's Degrees	8	_____
Specialist Degrees	0	_____
Doctoral Degrees	0	_____

Extended Operations

Branch Campuses

None

Recommended Change: No Change

Additional Locations

None

Recommended Change: No Change

Correspondence Education

None

Recommended Change: No Change

Distance Delivery

43.0104 - Criminal Justice/Safety Studies, Bachelor, Criminal Justice & Criminology

44.07 - Social Work, Master, Social Work

44.0701 - Social Work, Bachelor, Social Work

51.0701 - Health/Health Care Administration/Management, Bachelor, Health Care Management

51.3801 - Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse, Bachelor, Nursing

52.0301 - Accounting, Bachelor, Accounting

52.1201 - Management Information Systems, General, Bachelor, Computer Information Systems

Contractual Arrangements

None

Recommended Change: No Change

Institutional Status and Requirements Worksheet

Consortial Arrangements

None

Recommended Change: No Change
