

Assurance Argument

Rend Lake College - IL

Review date: 6/12/2023

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.

Argument

The Rend Lake College mission is: "Rend Lake College provides educational opportunities across cultural and economic boundaries to the diverse student population we serve. We are committed to our students' success in achieving their educational goals and to meeting our community-focused program objectives. With Rend Lake College, student journeys start here."

1A1

The mission is developed through a process suited to the context of the institution. Prior to work commencing on the Assurance Argument in 2015, the mission documents were last significantly updated in 2007-2008, in preparation for the Self-Study and reaccreditation visit (previous mission documents).

Beginning in 2016, a new Mission Committee met several times to re-examine the mission documents and to suggest any needed revisions. This included a focused effort during an HLC Steering Committee retreat in October 2016. The committee suggested various changes to the mission statement and documents, including removal of the Philosophy Statement because of its more theoretical nature, removal of the "Our students' success is our own success" tagline, and inclusion of language to make the mission more relevant in today's digitally connected society (minutes). The statements on diversity were combined into two instead of three, and the General Education Statement was relocated to the official college catalog.

A notable development from this process was the inclusion of a new value statement: “In serving our students and community, we are student-focused, authentic, and resourceful.” The Mission Review Committee found that these three concepts are qualities to which the institution has been dedicated in its operations (Mission minutes). Student focus is central to our mission, and the revisions to the mission documents helped articulate this. This value statement was slightly altered in July 2022 by changing to more active language; the statement now says "we are" instead of "we strive to be".

1A2

In April 2016, the Board of Trustees granted final approval to create the Mission Statement Review policy and procedure (Policy 2.1125), crafted as a way to regularly engage the Board with the mission and related statements. The Board now reviews and approves the mission documents annually, most recently in July 2022. The mission documents also are reviewed by college employees during the annual strategic planning process.

The mission statement references our provision of educational opportunities across economic and cultural boundaries. As explained below, the mission also references our institutional outcomes for degree-seeking students and the varied reasons students may choose to enroll. Additionally, in March 2023, the board approved a neurodiversity statement recognizing a strengths-based method for understanding conditions such as autism, dyslexia, ADD/ADHD, and others.

1A3

The Diversity of Purpose statement explains that the college serves various types of students, including traditional and non-traditional in both academic and career technical areas. Reasons students engage with us are listed, including educational requirements, curiosity, retraining, new skills, and healthy lifestyles. The Diversity of Culture statement reflects RLC’s characterization of serving a relatively homogenous, small-town culture, serving a population with diversity based on age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity / race, and gender (district demographics). There is little ethnic diversity in the district, and a larger level of socioeconomic diversity. Taken collectively, these diversity statements make up the Who We Serve section of our mission documents. It explains the distinctiveness of our student population, which is a necessary component of how we meet our programmatic goals. Our Common Outcome indicates that the college will serve each student equally, regardless of background, purpose or origin. The Definition of Equity was added to the mission in 2021 as part of the college's continuing efforts to improve upon multiculturalism, equity and diversity.

In addition to the mission statement itself, the mission documents include the four institutional outcomes – critical thinking, problem solving, oral communication and written communication

(CPOW) – as well as the statements regarding who we are, who we serve, equity and common outcome.

1A4

RLC's academic programming, student support services and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission to provide educational opportunities across economic and cultural boundaries. The mission documents express the college's commitment to instill the four major learning outcomes (CPOW) to all of our degree-seeking students, and this is evidenced by the fact that these four outcomes are embedded into all degree curricula and assessed. Inclusion of these outcomes into the mission documents provides a direct connection between the mission and academic programming.

As an open-admission institution, students come from diverse backgrounds and varying levels of preparation. In its context as a public community college, RLC offers two-year Associate in Science, Arts, Fine Arts, Engineering Science and Applied Science degrees as well as shorter-term occupational certificates. These offerings are appropriate to the mission of "providing general, transfer and career-technical education" (Diversity of Purpose). RLC offers 31 associate degree programs and 80 certificates (curriculum master). Student educational goals, such as transfer or workforce entry, are discussed during the advisement process. Classes are offered in traditional, online, remote, hybrid, hybrid flex, and blended flex (course delivery) formats for increased accessibility, and distance learning technology is used to connect with the college's additional locations in Mt. Vernon and Pinckneyville as well as in-district high schools. Assessment of academic programming is addressed in **4B**.

District poverty rates vary based on family situation, and it is important that RLC remains economically viable across "economic boundaries". ICCB numbers indicate about 10.5% (8,977 adults) were in poverty in 2021. In FY 2022, 1,455 students collectively received \$5,222,057 in federal student aid, the majority coming from PELL grants (\$2,667,470) (Fact Book). Another \$883,725 in state aid was awarded to 723 students.

The college withdrew from the federal direct student loan program in Summer 2013 (February 2013 Board minutes). This was done in response to the Department of Education's move in 2009 to track default rates on a three-year cohort basis instead of a two-year basis. However, student loans remain available through alternative providers (Financial Aid Booklet). The RLC Foundation, a separate non-profit entity with the goal of garnering support for scholarships and institutional growth, issues hundreds of student scholarships annually, with awards totaling \$227,536 in FY 2022 and \$242,040 awarded as of April 2023 (scholarship summary).

RLC has endeavored to maintain a reasonable tuition rate. Tuition has remained at \$110 per credit hour since it was set at that rate in February 2016 (February 2016 Board minutes), primarily in response to the state budget impasse (Board recommendation). This allows RLC to remain an affordable option for our constituents when compared to four-year universities (NCES table) and keeps us on par with our neighboring community colleges (ICCB tuition

comparisons). There is a per-credit-hour instructional support fee of \$40 (Policy 4.1115) for most courses which includes costs associated with technology, facilities, and other general costs associated with academic services of the College. This fee was increased from \$25 to \$40 (board packet) to account for the all-inclusive textbook program introduced in 2021 (board minutes).

Student support services are appropriate to the mission. A strong example of this is the Student Transfer and Retention Support (STARS) program, which provides first-generation, low-income and disabled students with the support services they need to successfully complete an associate degree and transfer to a four-year college or university (catalog description). STARS is a Student Support Services grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education as a component of TRIO and assists up to 160 students annually (STARS report). In addition to the Academic Advisement Center and the Financial Aid Office, other student support services include the Learning Enhancement Center, which includes the Communications Lab, Writing Center, Mathematics Lab and tutoring assistance; the Career Technical Education Success Center; RL-Cares, a free service encouraging students to discuss issues, whether personal or academic, pertaining to their educational futures; Career Services, providing career counseling for undecided students as well as assistance with resumes and interviews; the RLC Foundation Children's Center, providing care for children six weeks through five years and for school-age children in the summer; the First-Year Experience orientation program; and several others outlined in the Student Services and Activities section of the Catalog and in **3D1**.

Rend Lake College's enrollment profile (Fact Book) is consistent with district population figures (ICCB census). In 2022, about 53% of students were female, nearly 91% were white, and more than 48% fell into the 17-20 age range. RLC's district encompasses the major portions of Jefferson, Franklin, Hamilton and Perry counties; large areas of Wayne and White counties; and small, unpopulated portions of Washington and Williamson counties (ICCB map). An analysis of students by county shows that, in FY 2022, 1,118 and 961 students came from Jefferson and Franklin counties, respectively (students by county), which are the counties in the district with the highest populations. Most of our students were part-time (Fact Book). Regional programming draws some students from areas outside our district. In 2022, 80.1% of our students lived in-district (enrollment by residency).

1A5

The mission statement and documents are clear and articulated publicly. They are published in several places, including the college website, RLC Catalog, class schedules, the RLC Fact Book, Employee Handbook, Student Handbook and the annual Report to Our Community, and are reviewed by new employees as part of the orientation process (orientation checklist). The mission statement, value statement and institutional outcomes also are included on course syllabi. The strategic planning process flows from the mission (strategic planning cycle). The mission is featured in the annual Commencement Program and in the District Site and Construction Master Plan, and is presented to and reviewed by business and industry Advisory Committees annually (Advisory Committee agenda template). The college logo, mission

statement, and values are featured prominently throughout campus buildings via vinyl decals on walls.

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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.

Argument

1B1

Rend Lake College's actions and decisions reflect a public obligation, and in fulfilling its core mission, the college contributes to the greater community. In 2021, Northern Illinois University's Center for Governmental Studies, working with the Illinois Community College Board, conducted an economic impact study (EIS) of the state's community college system. The overall report was then segmented for individual colleges. RLC's report shows that a program graduate of RLC can expect a total lifetime earnings gain of \$685,150 over a 40-year career, a 28.5 percent return on investment; students who completed an Associate in Applied Science Degree or long-term certificate at RLC saw first-year earnings gains of \$11,086. The EIS shows that 88.1 percent of students who graduated in 2009 were employed after 10 years, which is slightly higher than the state average of 77.7 percent.

The college is among the largest employers in the district and generates additional economic benefits for local communities through expenditures and employment impacts. In 2020, more than \$6.8 million in wages and benefits were paid to 257 RLC employees residing in the area (p. 33). RLC's purchases and expenditures also mix into the local economy. These direct and indirect expenditures approached a total of \$22.9 million in economic output and more than 300 jobs in the district.

Partnerships with neighboring institutions benefit the students and the public. Most notable is the partnership between RLC and Southeastern Illinois College, a public community college neighbor to the southeast of RLC. The colleges have worked together to offer coursework in Spanish, sociology, history, physics, music and more, and work together at the program level for Veterinary Assistant. RLC also sends its maintenance staff to SIC to help with projects, and has shared a programmer with SIC remotely. In October 2021, the board signed a comprehensive institutional and academic alliance with a long-term plan for working together for the benefit of our areas (RLC-SIC Alliance). RLC also has a dual-credit agreement with John A. Logan College directly south of us.

The college offers dual credit and dual enrollment classes to in-district high school juniors and seniors in order to help them accelerate their college education. Because tuition is waived for dual credit classes, in-district students and their families saved \$447,370 in tuition (Fact Book, p. 25) and \$357,714 in books in FY 2022 (p. 24). That year, 1,292 students took 4,067 credit hours across the participating high schools and programs (p. 24). In some cases, students from in-district schools are transported to the Ina campus for instruction in areas such as automotive technology and welding, or in general education classes when the sending high school does not have a qualified instructor in a particular area. A statewide reciprocal agreement between Illinois community colleges allows out-of-district students to pay in-district tuition rates and attend programs at another community college if not offered in their residing district.

Similar to dual credit in value to the community, dual enrollment classes are offered outside the normal high school day and thus do not result in high school credit. Tuition is offered at half cost for the first eight hours per semester, plus the cost of supplies, and the instructional support and course fees. In FY 2022, 133 students took a total of 670 dual enrollment hours (2022 Fact Book, p. 26).

The college has two additional locations, the RLC MarketPlace in Mt. Vernon and the RLC Murphy-Wall Pinckneyville Campus. Mt. Vernon is the largest city in RLC's district and Pinckneyville is in the far west side of the district; these locations provide greater access for our constituents. In addition to the education function, the MarketPlace is a benefit to the public good in other ways. Through a lease with the state, it houses a branch of the Illinois One-Stop Center, which includes the Departments of Human Services and Employment Security, Office of Rehabilitation Services and Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse. Studio RLC, the college's cosmetology program, offers services to the public, as does the college-owned Blended II Coffee Shop, and there are a privately-owned shoe store and a restaurant on site. Meeting space is available for rent to outside organizations, and Project CHILD, the grant-funded Child Care Resource and Referral program, is located here.

In June 2022, RLC was awarded a \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) to construct a new manufacturing academy at the MarketPlace (press release). Dubbed the Southern Illinois Manufacturing Academy, this will be a state-of-the-art manufacturing training center. RLC and its consortium partners, Southeastern Illinois College and Kaskaskia College, will collaborate on outreach, enrollment, training, employer engagement, and job placement throughout its Southern Illinois footprint.

Another benefit is the various articulation agreements RLC has with four-year institutions (agreements list), allowing students to complete the requisite associate degree coursework here and transfer smoothly into related programs at four-year institutions. The college also rents space to Southern Illinois University Carbondale, which offers a selection of four-year degree programs at the MarketPlace.

Some programs appropriate to our mission are retained despite reduced resources. An example is the continued support for the college's Adult Education and Literacy program, even in light of decreased support from the state and federal levels. The RLC Foundation Children's Center operates at a loss each year but provides child care for students who need it, and serves as a

learning lab for college students in the Early Childhood Education program. Projected revenues for 2023 were \$196,000, compared to projected expenses of \$401,272 (FY 2023 budget).

The college is a member of the one-stop delivery system in Local Workforce Area #25, which is affiliated with the Southern Illinois Workforce Development Board. The SIWDB's purpose is to integrate education, business and labor in an effort to direct workforce development in the area. Similarly, the college provides office space at the MarketPlace for Man-Tra-Con, an organization which promotes economic development in the region by offering services needed to provide a quality regional workforce.

The college organizes the annual Job Search Party, formerly held in Mt. Vernon but moved in 2023 to the newly renovated Event Center on the Ina campus. At this career fair, open to the public, job seekers can speak with representatives of business, industry and public sector entities about job openings. In April 2023, more than 50 employers and other agencies registered for the event (press release). The Illinois Regional College Fair, sponsored by the Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling, is held on the Ina campus in the fall. Various colleges and universities are invited to speak with potential students about program offerings; in 2022, 45 colleges, universities and institutions participated (IRCF Layout 2022).

As a public community college governed by a Board of Trustees, there is no superordinate entity.

1B2

As a public community college, RLC does not have investors, a parent organization or external interests. The college's FY 2023 budget shows that 84.52%, or \$16.8 million, of budgeted operating fund expenses were projected to come from the Education Fund. The Education Fund includes categories such as Instruction, Academic Support, Student Services, Public Service / Community Education, Institutional Support, and Scholarships / Student Grants / Waivers. By comparison, 15.46%, or just over \$3 million, was projected from the Operations and Maintenance Fund.

1B3

Rend Lake College engages with its various constituencies as appropriate for its mission and capabilities. Career Technical Education (CTE) programs, made up primarily of educational offerings in the Allied Health and Applied Science and Technology divisions, make use of Advisory Committees (Advisory Committees Policy), bodies made up of professionals who currently work in or have expertise in a specific program discipline. These committees are meant to keep faculty and administration informed about what skills graduates will need in order to succeed in their respective fields. Advisory Committees have input into how the curriculum is designed and what skills are taught in classes.

A function of the Community and Corporate Education (CCE) Department is to serve as a link between the college and the community. CCE offers a slate of personal enrichment and professional development courses (CCE Catalog). Classes come in a wide range of subjects, including computer workshops, various exercise styles, cooking classes, taxidermy, street rodding, and many others, including day tours and trips. During the time of the COVID shutdown, when all offerings were remote, various departments on campus including CCE provided online courses on various topics in order to keep the community engaged (list).

In Fall 2020, the college worked with Inspired Engagement to conduct an appreciative inquiry meant to help develop an overall marketing strategy. In addition to an internal work group, surveys were sent out both community-wide and to targeted groups to obtain feedback on their opinions of the college's image and marketing efforts. This led to the creation of a Marketing Strategy to help guide our efforts going forward.

For several years, the college has partnered with Continental Tire in Mt. Vernon, the largest employer in RLC's district, to provide on-site education and training to its employees. This includes scheduling some classes on a staggered basis to accommodate shift changes among employees. In addition, students in RLC's Industrial Electronics and Maintenance Technician Associate in Applied Science Degree program have the option to intern with Continental Tire, with graduates often receiving priority consideration during the interview process.

In Summer 2018, RLC received approval from the U.S. Department of Labor to offer apprenticeships beginning Fall 2018 in four programs: Industrial Maintenance Technology, Basic Machining Technology, Truck Driver Training and Welding Technology. Offerings have expanded since that time (apprenticeships overview). Through this program, students work with local industry in paid apprenticeships.

The college partners with numerous businesses and organizations to provide clinical and on-the-job training experiences in many programs. Continuing education events such as CNA workshops have been held on campus, along with events related to groups such as 4H.

RLC also partners with area organizations to facilitate entrepreneurship among young people. This began with the Jefferson County CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program, in which participating students in Jefferson County high schools (Mt. Vernon, Waltonville, Webber and Woodlawn) are exposed to real-life entrepreneurial situations, travel to various businesses in the area, hear from entrepreneurs, and ultimately design, implement and promote their own ideas for business ventures. Participating students earn college credit, and most of the participating high schools grant their students high school credit as well. The college provides the facilitator for CEO and the Franklin County counterpart, EDGE (Entrepreneurial Development Growth & Education). For 2023, 16 students participated in the Jefferson County CEO and eight in the Franklin County EDGE program.

Rend Lake College participates in the Land of Lincoln / Southern Seven AmeriCorps ([flyer](#)) program, which sends participating students into the community to tutor and mentor at local schools. Participants are eligible to receive stipends and an education award (Catalog).

RLC Foundation staff and members of President's Cabinet visit high school award events to present scholarships and academic awards, and members of the Academic Advisement Center visit area high schools to meet, advise and register students. Dual credit is a major initiative, with 12 of our 13 in-district high schools participating. Financial Aid staff visit area high schools for FAFSA completion workshops. The college publicizes College Signing Days by visiting in-district high schools and taking group pictures of seniors enrolling at RLC.

The Kickstart Your Journey event brings high school freshmen and sophomores to campus to learn some of the basics of college and of independent living. Topics discussed include financial literacy, budgeting, goal setting, college programs, and others. The college holds the Children's Health Fair in the spring for pupils in kindergarten through sixth grade. They participate in health and physical fitness activities encouraging them to be active, eat better, and more. A popular project engaging local second-grade students is Flat Stanley, which is part of the First-Year Experience program.

This list of campus events, gleaned from a fiscal year's worth of board packets, includes these and several other additional examples of engagement with internal and external constituencies. Create and Strengthen Community and Industry Partnerships is one of the six focuses of our strategic planning process, and there are several items relating to this in the current plan. The RLC Event Center, the Rec (recreational center) and the Private Dining Area in the Student Center are among the areas on campus which host public and private events. The college uses a Resource Scheduler software system to handle the renting and use of facilities by both external and internal groups.

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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.

Argument

1C1

In 2018, the Higher Learning Commission requested a follow-up report addressing Rend Lake College's role in a multicultural society. That process resulted in RLC re-prioritizing its support of students from one primarily focused on low-income and first generation status to a broader scope now focused on the federally protected classes (Focus Report). Policy, budgeting, and planning demonstrate that equity, diversity, and inclusivity are institutional priorities. The college's mission documents establish this priority in several places, including an equity definition and the adoption (July 2023) of a Neurodiversity Statement as part of mission language. The college's general education outcomes focus on professional success and multicultural citizenship: making "connections," becoming an "authentic" professional, and "demonstrating the ability to successfully live and work in a multicultural world" (General Education Outcomes). Since FY 2017, the college's budget for DEI activities has been expanded from approximately \$7,000 annually to over \$20,000 for FY 2023 (FY2023 DEI Budget Lines). In 2018, feedback from two DEI committees and a student campus climate focus group (**see 3C3 below**) resulted in an institution-level strategic focus, "Foster a Campus Culture of Equity and Inclusion." This strategic focus continues as one of six foci for the college's three-year strategic planning cycle (Equity Strategic Planning Focus). With the passing of Illinois Bill 5464, requiring all Illinois colleges to have an equity plan, a new equity plan focused on strategic initiatives, institutional research, CCSSE results, assessment findings, and financial aid review is in development. Previously, RLC's Equity Plan was more an activities plan for budgeting (Previous Equity Plan). The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) is currently developing a template for community colleges to follow in building the state required plan. A cross-curricular Equity and Diversity Work Group, DEI Advisory group (DEI Advisory Notes 2022) and a Cultural Arts Calendar Committee have been merged post-COVID into one committee to streamline processes and better coordinate all DEI initiatives (DEI Meeting Summary-Feb23). This reformed committee is populated by a cross-section of all academic divisions and most departments (New DEI Committee Roster). This committee, chaired by the Student Success Coordinator, drives the co-curricular DEI activities at the college (DEI Meeting Minutes-

April23). Assessment of the college's multicultural general education outcome drives most curriculum activities as explained in **3B3 and 4B2**.

As a community college located where many available jobs are industrial and technical in nature, the college focuses heavily on workplace success. All certificate-seeking students must take a required employability skills class, BUSI 1202, focusing on the soft skills needed to be a successful employee and including a diversity component. All degree-seeking students must take a first-year experience course, ORIE 1101. In this course, student learning is focused on many of the institutional-level outcomes, including "connections" and "multiculturalism" (see **3B3, 4B2**). Course content specific to workplace success also includes career advisement and a CliftonStrengths Training assessment, a metacognitive tool adopted by the college to improve communication and understanding of diverse strengths in the workplace. Required on-the-job training and clinical experiences, AmeriCorps, and a recently expanded apprenticeship program all play a significant role in preparing our students for workplace success. The Adult Education program also includes a Job Readiness program. Many opportunities for improving job hunting skills are also provided annually including the WSIL job fair, speed interviewing sessions, and career counseling, which is provided as part of ORIE 1101 and by appointment.

1C2

DEI processes, activities, and initiatives can be categorized by their leadership structures: administratively governed, faculty led, and Perkins generated.

Administratively Governed

Policy:

In addition to the recent inclusion of equity and neurodiversity mission language (see **1C1**), the college revised its general education curriculum to require a multicultural elective for all degree-seeking students (Multicultural Elective Requirement). A more detailed explanation of this process is outlined in **3B3**. The college addresses inclusivity and equity through several other policies. The college is an equal opportunity employer and states this in job postings, on its website and college notice boards across campus. The inside cover of the Catalog contains a non-discrimination statement indicating the college's commitment to decisions involving students and employees being based on merit and free from discrimination in all its forms. The college non-harassment policy is found on every course syllabus (Non-Harassment Policy).

Resources and Training:

The college uses the Illinois Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) for consultation and training regarding equity and inclusivity. Our Perkins grant coordinator also uses OCCRL resources to guide her work. In the past, the college has used OCCRL professionals to consult on DEI campus initiatives and train on inclusivity and equity in the classroom (RLC Equity Incubator Workshop). Trainings in DEI and multiculturalism topics have been a college focus since 2019 (DEI Training Timeline 2019-2020). Student Success Day includes multicultural assessment and equity updates (Equity PowerPoint SSD). RLC is also a member of

the Illinois Community College Diversity Commission (ICCDC), designating its Coordinator of Student Success and Wellness as its delegate (ICCDC Website). Additionally, annual FERPA training is conducted through Vector Solutions Training software. The LGBTQIA+ trainings are outlined in **1C3 below**.

Equitable Access:

The college agencies have completed a number of projects and changed several processes to better provide equitable access to all students:

- **2019-Ongoing:** Providing advisement and registration services at local high schools and community centers including FAFSA workshops, college Q&A, and advisement (Roland Lewis Outreach Plan).
- **2019-Ongoing:** Developing Transitional English and math courses in compliance with the Illinois Community College Board transitional English and math policy to “avoid remedial courses for students entering college from high school” (**see 3D2**).
- **Spring 2021:** Improved connectivity to the college’s Wi-Fi, expanded Wi-Fi access to parking lots as well as our area education centers (**see 3D4**).
- **Spring 2021:** Expanded the laptop loaner program from serving TRiO students to serving all students. Laptops and cameras are now available for all students to check out (**see 3D4**).
- **Spring 2021:** Expanded availability of all major student support services; advisement, registration, and tutoring are now available online (**see 3D1**).
- **Fall 2021:** Received a \$91,353 U.S. Department of Education Child Care Access Means Parents in School grant to help low-income students pay for childcare expenses (Child Care Access Grant).
- **Fall 2021:** Implemented a series of flexible and hybrid course modalities to better accommodate student need during and post-COVID (**see 3D**).
- **Fall 2021:** Created an RLC Veteran Tuition Scholarship, available for any service member who wants to change careers. It helps students pay for college even when other financial assistance is exhausted.
- **Summer 2022:** Implemented an all-inclusive textbook program. The cost of textbooks for the majority of students is included in the universal fee structure, allowing students to better afford textbooks.
- **Fall 2023:** The college is developing a competency-based curriculum in Welding Technology, which will improve equitable access with enhanced entry and exit points, flexible scheduling, less time and cost to completion, and high-touch student success strategies (CBE Plan).

New Community Partnerships:

RLC is developing new partnerships with black leaders in our district. In 2020 college leaders met with black business and community leaders to explore opportunities to better serve black students (Community Outreach Minutes). Some discussions centered on an Illinois equity workforce grant. Though those discussions did not result in a grant proposal, the college is renewing its pursuit of this award and attended a Illinois Workforce Equity Initiative symposium

in June 2023 to help focus this effort (WEI Symposium Agenda). The college partnered with a regional arts center, Cedarhurst, to bring in Jess Brown, an entertainer, activist, and artist, for a week-long residency. She headlined a community empowerment parade, visited the RLC summer Kids Camp and hosted a museum “spectacle” where those who feel intimidated and marginalized by museums learned to claim that space (Jessica Brown Materials). In Fall 2021 the college began an informal partnership with Southtown Family Center, a community-based youth support service agency. So far, this partnership has included SFC setting up information booths at on-campus DEI events and their students attending RLC cultural events.

Protected Classes and Wellness:

Veterans: A Veteran's Committee was formed in 2017 to review increasing support of college's veteran students. The college expanded veteran-focused activities, including periodic recognitions of individual veterans and a Veteran's Day honor ceremony. The college's Financial Aid Office includes two Veterans certifying officials, who act as liaisons between the college and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. They help veterans submit applications for military benefits and other financial aid and officially certify their enrollment to ensure timely payments. They also organize periodic fundraisers for veteran students.

Students with Disabilities: Disability access services are available to provide reasonable accommodations and equal access to programming for those with documented disabilities. The college has chosen to use the findings of the Spring 2019 civil rights review as a guideline for current improvements in campus accessibility and support services (Civil Rights Review Compliance Response). An RFP for a redesign of the college's website, including improved access, is in development as of this writing.

Wellness Center:

A Wellness Center space was created in Fall 2020 with financial support from the RLC Foundation. This multipurpose space in the Learning Resource Center provides resources for mental health and a referral service. The space also acts as an information center supporting diverse student needs. It is promoted as a respite from academic and personal anxiety and as an LGBTQIA+ safe space. It provides activities to de-stress including self-guided mindfulness cards, yoga mats, a Zen garden, and art supplies. The center is managed by the Coordinator of Student Success and Wellness who also organizes annual speakers and events. She also authors a comprehensive Community Resource Booklet.

Faculty Led

Expanded Events and Opportunity:

In 2018 a co-curricular diversity week began as part of a revised diversity module in the college's First Year Experience course, ORIE 1101 (**see 3B3**). There is now an increase in events during diversity week, with the college seeking additional regional and national speakers and performers. More events spotlighting wellness are also included. The college is now facilitating events related to national recognition months such as Black History Month. Recent events

focused on the black experience include Emmy-award winning storyteller Bobby Norfolk, Poet Laureate of Illinois, Angela Jackson, and the Americorps-sponsored MLK Beloved Community Mindset Presentation. Scheduled events now showcase experiences from a wide variety of ideological and cultural perspectives (DEI and Cultural Events 2019-2020 and 2020-2023).

Sunflower Project:

RLC created a sunflower project in partnership with Cedarhurst Center for the Arts and the Mt. Vernon City Council. Project leaders identified unused lots in Mt. Vernon's low income neighborhoods and developed an improvement project involving community leaders as well as area grade school and college students (Sunflower Project).

DEI Book Club:

Starting in Fall 2023, a DEI-themed book club will begin meeting for discussion sessions (DEI Book Club Email).

Diversity Leadership Convention:

Three students were selected and registered to attend the National Student Leadership Diversity Convention in Chicago before the conference was canceled in Spring 2020 because of COVID. The intent was for these students to voice on-campus DEI concerns based on their convention experiences. The DEI Committee is reviewing the possibility of folding this initiative into the DEI Committee structure by sponsoring students to attend national and regional DEI conferences and then reporting back to the committee.

Perkins Generated

The special populations coordinator oversees equity-centered initiatives in our career-technical programs. A Pathway to Success Grant promoting underrepresented students by gender was completed in 2018. The office continues to seek Perkins opportunities to improve student equity and inclusivity. The special population office maintains success data disaggregated by race, age, and gender in career-technical programs (Perkins Reports 2023).

1C3

Along with its formal complaint processes (**see 2E4**), the college relies on periodic focus group data, graduate surveys, and other campus climate instruments to identify and address issues regarding any potential or existing disrespectful or discriminatory behavior that could negatively affect students.

The college held two focus group sessions in Fall 2019 for student input into campus climate regarding DEI and other campus issues. Around 40 students participated, representing a cross-section of student demographics, including black, LGBTQIA+, and non-traditional students. The Student Success Coordinator and select faculty led discussions. The feedback from participating black students did not indicate a climate of disrespect or discrimination, but LGBTQIA+ students

voiced several concerns in that regard (2019 Focus Group Minutes). These responses prompted increased equity and inclusivity initiatives to support the LGBTQIA+ student population (**see below**). Focus group sessions with similar student populations and numbers were held in Fall 2022 and Spring 2023. Though some concerns were noted, feedback was significantly positive regarding RLC campus climate in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusivity, with several students perceiving the college as accepting and even a "refuge" (2022-23 Focus Group Minutes). The college recognizes that positive focus group responses are only one avenue of confirming a climate of respect and remains committed to its DEI focus.

Based on focus group feedback, a reboot of our LGBTQIA+ club began in 2019 (LGBTQIA+ Meeting Summaries) and LGBTQIA+ focused presentations and cultural events opportunities expanded. A safe space initiative began in the Summer 2020. Chip Loghry, former Rainbow Café consultant and LGBTQIA+ mentor, led a train-the-trainer Zoom workshop that focused on how college faculty and staff could create their own in-house Safe Space training program. Nine faculty and staff participated, and in a follow-up session, a framework for training was established. In Spring 2022, the lead faculty trainer conducted an in-service session on LGBTQIA+ literacy (Safer Space Presentation). That same semester, "All Are Welcome" signage for doors was distributed by request to over 60 campus offices (All Welcome Signage).

Periodic campus climate surveys are administered by the lead psychology instructor; data is shared institutionally. The President's Executive Leadership Team reviews all focus group responses, including these results (Campus Climate Psychology Students).

During the 2019 focus group sessions, out-of-district students in the athletics program expressed frustration regarding a lack of co-curricular activities. As student life returned to normal after COVID, a number of inclusivity initiatives were undertaken specifically focused on out-of-district and underrepresented minority athletes. These events not only addressed focus group concerns, but also were driven by our general education outcome of students establishing professional connections and our desire to be a more inclusive college community:

- **Fall 2022:** Taco bar semester kick-off focusing on out-of-district students. Community leaders were invited to meet our out-of-district students (Taco Bar Responses).
- **Fall 2022:** Team-up with Mt. Vernon Clean and Green for a morning community clean-up (Participant Responses).
- **Fall 2022:** Cooking session with Chef Fairbanks as an interpersonal and multicultural experience for athletes.
- **Spring 2023:** Service learning opportunity for athletes, faculty, and staff to read to children through our children's library reading program.
- **Fall 2023 (anticipated):** A team-building nature retreat for athletes scheduled for Spring 2023 has been postponed until Fall 2023.

The college also focuses on CliftonStrengths Training for faculty, staff, and students as a method to generate discussions regarding the need for diverse attributes and personality traits to coalesce for an organization to thrive and be successful.

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1.S - Criterion 1 - Summary

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

Summary

Rend Lake College has a student-focused mission appropriate for its area, offering associate degrees and occupational certificates to meet goals of transfer or workforce entry. The mission is articulated throughout the institution and in public documents, reviewed yearly by the Board of Trustees, and integrated into the strategic planning process.

The mission serves the public good, as shown by initiatives such as high school-based entrepreneurship programs, elementary and secondary learning and engagement events, and community outreach activities. A recent economic impact study demonstrates how the college's presence benefits its region. The college engages with its community in many ways, including Community Education offerings, advisory committees, workshops, and more.

Following the last comprehensive evaluation, RLC was asked for an interim report on the previous Core Component 1C, addressing our role in a multicultural society. Our efforts in this area are greatly improved, including the creation of a DEI Advisory Committee and outreach to underserved populations. Those seeking AA, AS, AES and AFA degrees now must take at least one multicultural elective.

Sources

There are no sources.

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.

Argument

2A1

As outlined in 1A1, Rend Lake College developed the mission in a manner appropriate to our context. In April 2016, the Board granted final approval to create the Mission Statement Review policy and procedure (Policy 2.1125), crafted as a way to engage the Board with the mission statement on an annual basis. The most recent approval was July 2022 (board packet, minutes).

2A2

Financial

Financial integrity is assured in several ways, particularly via approval of the annual budget and monthly public board meetings (sample agenda). The Board of Trustees approves expenditures (meeting minutes) and reviews financial information at each month's meeting; the monthly check registry also is available at the meeting. Major expenditures are projected and reviewed by President's Cabinet annually during the strategic planning process (overview), which feeds into the preparation of the budget. The budget sits for public inspection for 30 days as required by law. A public hearing is held on the budget prior to adoption, and public hearings also are held in the event of bond issuances. The annual tax levy is set in accordance with Truth in Taxation laws (minutes). The college undergoes an annual audit, which is presented to the Board by a member of the auditing firm (minutes).

The FY 2022 audit was a clean audit with one finding which was immediately corrected, and there were no material weaknesses reported. The FY 2020 and 2021 audits also were clean audits with no material weaknesses, and each had one finding related to financial assistance reporting (2020, 2021).

To facilitate compliance in financial aid, enrollment reporting, and other areas, the Director of Institutional Compliance position was created in February 2021 and was filled by an existing member of the Financial Aid Department. Since then, the position has taken on oversight of institutional research and also serves as the Director of Financial Aid following the resignation of the previous director in July 2022 (job description).

More about budgeting and monitoring expenses can be found in **5A**, and the strategic planning process is described in detail in **5C**.

Academics

Students are governed by the rights, responsibilities and Student Code of Conduct contained in the Student Handbook. The content of the Handbook covers topics such as the complaint process, student discipline, academic integrity and several other relevant policies and procedures. Specifically, the academic integrity portion of the Handbook includes the college's definition of academic dishonesty, labels it as a violation of the Student Code of Conduct, and includes the procedures for addressing it. The Handbook also contains procedures for addressing student academic complaints. Additionally, several career technical programs have their own handbooks containing rules and guidelines specific to those programs.

RLC's policy on Performance Evaluation and Tenure of Faculty Members addresses the college's commitment to its educational program: "The single most important responsibility of the Rend Lake College Board, faculty, and staff is to provide a quality instructional program designed to promote effective student learning." Faculty are the content experts in their areas and have ownership of academic content. Integrity of classes and curricula is addressed by the approval and review process, outlined in the Curriculum Development and Course Approval policies. The college's Academic Council reviews and approves any curricular changes (example agenda and minutes), additions or withdrawals prior to sending these to the chief academic officer. These are then sent to the Board of Trustees (board minutes) for approval and, if warranted, submission to ICCB for action. RLC's Director of Instructional Design and Assessment teaches an instructional methods course geared for RLC instructors. More on this topic is found in **3A3**.

Academic integrity is further assured by regional accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission. Several programs have specific accreditations, while others are approved by agencies such as the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation and the Illinois Department of Public Health (catalog). The college undergoes the ICCB recognition process every five years (recognition certificate), ensuring the college meets ICCB's instructional, administrative, financial, and other standards (ICCB Recognition Manual).

Regular evaluation of instructors adds to academic integrity and is addressed in **3C3**. Non-tenured faculty are evaluated by their dean, vice president or designee at least once each semester for the first two and a half years of employment. Tenured faculty are evaluated at least once

every three years. Tenure eligibility is addressed in accordance with Article IIIb of the Illinois Public Community College Act.

Instructor qualifications are grounded in Policy 3.1012 and are discussed in **3C**. Assessment of student learning is addressed in **4B**.

Human Resources

Integrity in personnel issues is addressed in multiple ways. In the years since the 2018 comprehensive evaluation, the college has expanded its Human Resource Department from one staff member to three: the Director of Human Resources and a Human Resources Generalist, overseen by the Executive Director of Administrative Services.

The college is an equal opportunity employer and announces this in job postings and at www.rlc.edu/jobs. Jobs are advertised in several online formats, and the procedure for screening, interviewing and selecting full-time employees is covered in the Selection of Personnel policy. Interview committees, which include the appropriate Cabinet member, are convened to interview selected candidates. Committee members sign a form indicating they have read the job description and advertisement and will recommend a candidate based on merit, and listing the qualifications and rationale for recommending a candidate. Upon the President's approval of the recommendation, the candidate is taken to the Board for approval (example). The President or designee is responsible for the recruitment, appointment, evaluation and termination of part-time personnel. Offers of employment are contingent on background checks (Policy 2.1700). The Employee Handbook includes policies on workplace expectations, ethics, conduct and more. Employees with financial duties and all board members are required annually to file a statement of economic interest with the county clerk. Section 3 of the RLC Policy Manual is dedicated to employee matters, and others such as nepotism and ethics are addressed in Section 2. In 2016, all job descriptions were reviewed to ensure currency and compliance with proposed Department of Labor regulations (minutes).

Faculty and staff qualifications are addressed in **3C3** and **5B1**, respectively. Non-faculty personnel are evaluated as described in Policy 3.1200. Evaluations may be conducted at any time, with written evaluations for all personnel to be completed by June 30 of each even-numbered year and placed in their employee file. Since returning from the COVID shutdown, RLC has adopted limited remote work for employees whose job duties permit it (3.1016).

The college publishes the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 notice in both its Catalog and Student Handbook as well as on its website and public notification bulletin boards found in every student-accessed building on campus and off-site locations. Publicly accessed documents include contact information for filing a complaint. Internally, the act is located in the RLC Policy Manual (4.1405). This policy, along with Policy 4.1400, Student Records, was developed from the Illinois School Student Records Act, which provides guidance in the management of and access to sensitive student records.

Online FERPA training is assigned to all new full-time employees. In Spring 2023, online training on FERPA, sexual harassment, and mandated reporting was issued to employees through Vector Solutions, with 211 out of 305 registrants completing all three.

The college also works with Vector Solutions to provide online training regarding Title IX, the Violence Against Women Act, the Illinois Preventing Sexual Violence in Higher Education Act and other pertinent federal and state regulations and institutional policies. Training modules are sent to all faculty and staff, and to any student taking at least one credit class on campus. The college maintains a dedicated webpage at www.rlc.edu/titleix-policy containing the college's policy on discrimination, harassment, sexual assault and related offenses, as well as contact information, reporting procedures and survivor resources (Policy 2.1200). Annually, this policy and the URL of the webpage are sent by email to the entire student, faculty and staff population.

Auxiliary

The college's various auxiliary functions operate with integrity. The RLC Bookstore was one of the first in the state to implement a textbook rental program, designed to save students money. In 2021, the college converted to an all-inclusive textbook program, funded by a fee of \$15 per credit hour included within the universal instructional support fee. This allows students to obtain their textbooks without additional expense, with the exception of some specialized programs that require more expensive textbooks. Computers and other supplies, such as tool kits, are available for purchase using financial aid.

Student athletes are bound by the Student Athlete Handbook, which includes the Athletic Department philosophy and guidelines on subjects such as eligibility, financial aid requirements, attendance at the Learning Enhancement Center, residency, the Student Athlete Code of Conduct, and more. Coaching staff must abide by the Coaches Handbook, which includes discussion of the responsibilities of coaches, fundraising, sexual harassment, and privacy, among others.

For several years, the college operated the RLC Aquatics Center, featuring an indoor swimming pool and therapy pool. Due to declining use and high maintenance costs, the decision was made to close the center, and the space was renovated and repurposed into the RLC Event Center (board packet). The first event held in the space was the annual Board / Faculty / Staff awards in Spring 2022. The space already has been in demand by the community and for RLC's own internal events.

The college has availed itself of grants when possible, and these are governed by comprehensive policies and procedures (RLC Policy Manual, Section 5) to ensure proper reporting and use of funds. Grants must first be approved via the Grant Development Approval Request form and must be within the scope of the college's mission. The Grant Report Review form also was created to ensure the integrity of needed reports, and this goes through an approval process as well.

Fair and Ethical Behavior

RLC's Board of Trustees establishes and follows ethics policies designed to avoid impropriety and to comply with the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act. These include policies 1.1320 and 2.1275, which establish a Board of Trustees Code of Ethics and an employee Code of Ethics, respectively. Policies and procedures are established by the Board upon recommendation of the President. These can be found in the RLC Policy Manual, the entire first section of which is devoted to Board operations and includes, among others, policies on the authority and powers of the Board and confidentiality.

New board members are required to complete the Open Meetings Act and Freedom of Information Act training provided by the Office of the Illinois Attorney General at least once during their service. Illinois Public Act 099-0692 requires community college trustees elected or appointed after Jan. 1, 2017, to complete four hours of trustee training during their first, third, and fifth years in office, with topics including ethics, audits, fiduciary responsibility, and more. Five current RLC board members have completed this training through the Illinois Community College Trustees Association, and this is indicated on the Board of Trustees page of the college website. Two new members were seated in April 2023.

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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.

Argument

2B1

Rend Lake College makes useful information readily available to students and the public through various platforms. The most comprehensive of these is the college's website, www.rlc.edu. The page at www.rlc.edu/tuition includes the college's current tuition rates and universal fees, a table of estimated costs and a link to a net price calculator. This URL is included in publications such as the RLC Catalog as a way to direct users to the most current tuition information. The page includes rates for all residencies. Also on the website are the list of course fees with justifications; the net price calculator, using a template from the National Center for Education Statistics; and other Financial Aid Department resources. Program cost sheets showing estimated tuition, fees and supplies for programs also are available on the site. Plans are underway for a website redesign to streamline navigation.

In the Catalog, which covers an academic year and is printed a few months before it becomes official, the URL only is provided because tuition rates may change in the interim. The printed class schedules, available on campus, in area high schools and on the website, include the actual tuition rates and universal fees. They are included here because the twice-annual printing provides ample opportunity to include the most current rates. Tuition also is included in other publications such as the Report to Our Community and the Fact Book.

Tuition rates are subject to Board of Trustees approval and are set at the February meeting each year (2023 minutes, packet). This action is included in the meeting highlights distributed to area media and other interested parties. They also are available at www.rlc.edu/news.

Admission and graduation requirements are outlined in the RLC Catalog, including special admissions requirements for particular programs. The Catalog is available in print and online, and an online addendum is maintained to make immediate note of changes. Admission information is detailed on the college website. Brochures containing information about the various programs are available online, as are course sequence outlines. A book list showing the texts required for individual classes also is available on the site.

Accreditation relationships are readily accessible. Affiliation with the Higher Learning Commission is presented on a dedicated page one click away from the home page, and the Mark of Affiliation is featured there and on several second-level pages throughout the website. Programmatic accreditation relationships are announced in the Catalog (Page 45) and in the respective program outlines, and online in both the specific program pages and on the Student Consumer Information page.

Information about full-time faculty and staff is presented in several locations. The Catalog contains names, titles, contact information and general educational information in the faculty and staff listing. There is a directory linked to the home page of the college website, and contact information for faculty involved in a particular educational program can be found on that program's web page. In other cases, such as advisement, financial aid and STARS, the staff members in those areas are listed along with their contact information.

In addition to the Catalog, other documents are publicly available. The college policy manual is linked to our website. Course schedules, available in print and online, include the schedule of classes plus information about registration, tuition and fees, textbook availability, important dates and more. The official Student Handbook is available in both formats and contains the Student Code of Conduct and other policies and information.

Institutional research information is available online at the RLC Achieves page, one click away from the home page. This page includes information about academic honors, student success rates, class size, Community College Survey of Student Engagement results, institutional assessment summaries and more. The college's Fact Book, a compilation of a significant amount of institutional research information, is linked here for public viewing. Also linked to this page are the college's Resource Allocation and Management Plan, District Site and Construction Master Plan, and the We Are Warriors section, outlining the various successes of students, faculty, staff and the institution itself. We recently began working with the Postsecondary Data Partnership program through the National Student Clearinghouse, and are currently verifying and uploading data sets. The PDP will generate web-based enrollment information dashboards that will link to our website.

Important policy information is available, including academic, institutional, and financial aid policies, both in the catalog and online. There is a dedicated web page for the college's sexual harassment and discrimination policy, and the Student Consumer Information page contains various information and disclosures required by regulations.

Communication with the public is further enabled by the college's social media presence. This includes platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, Snapchat and others.

The co-curricular programs are appropriate to the college's mission by contributing toward student success. Athletics are seen as extra-curricular while other activities available for students on a voluntary basis are viewed as co-curricular.

Co-curricular program outcomes have been developed and are connected to the mission through mapping (Co-Curricular Map). Financial literacy workshops, speed interviewing, Student Ambassadors, First-Year Experience and AmeriCorps are all co-curricular activities that have been mapped. Example outcomes include creating a financial plan and monthly budget, demonstrating increased confidence in interviews, and identifying Gallup Strengths in others to improve personal awareness. These connect to the mission's commitment to student success and the Diversity of Purpose statement, for instance, as well as the four institutional outcomes and the three general education outcomes (see **4B1**).

In addition to the diversity activities (**1C**) and the classroom experiences (**3B4**), our mission language concerning "working across cultural ... boundaries" and recognizing diversity is reflected in club activities that provide opportunities to explore diversity (RLC Catalog). Examples include AgHERCulture, Creative Writing, Culinary Arts, E-Sports, LGBTQA, RLC Thespians, and Student Ambassadors. Other organizations are service- or honor-based, such as AmeriCorps, Lambda Nu and Phi Theta Kappa.

Our mission directly addresses fulfilling our "community program objectives." Our community engagement is connected to mission through its inclusion as one of six main strategic planning focus areas: "Create and Strengthen Community and Industry Partnerships". Along with student, faculty, and staff engagement, the college documents the most recent community engagement across the institution (Community Partnerships, Strategic Plan). Ongoing and long-standing community engagement is documented in **1B**, including our community education offerings.

The college's mission also outlines our commitment to be student-focused, and the college is determined, "regardless of circumstance or a student's personal and educational goals" to provide the environment and support that leads to success. Implicit in that claim is our need to engage the community from which those students originate, including, whenever feasible, engagement with business and industry located in our district. **1B** outlines the significant economic partnerships and community engagement initiatives through which we do so.

To support economic development, the college also offers skill and trade opportunities for students seeking employment and economic mobility as stated in our Diversity of Purpose. Examples of this include campus visits from industry leaders and student field trips, as well as opportunities for cooperative education and apprenticeships. Community engagement and service learning projects are coordinated by faculty and staff to support student enrichment. For example, Culinary Arts students hold the Warrior Showcase each spring, in which they offer a full-service dining experience open to the public as part of their coursework. Other examples include on-the-job training and clinical experiences, class projects from psychology students, the AmeriCorps program, and college-sponsored blood drives.

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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.

Argument

2C1

The Board of Trustees is knowledgeable about the college and provides oversight. The authority, powers and duties of the Board are set forth in the Public Community College Act and are listed in limited form in RLC Policy 1.1305. The Board consists of seven members who sit for six-year terms. As directed by the Act and RLC Policy 1.1200, a student member of the Board is elected each year. To assist with legal matters, the Board has appointed a staff attorney on a part-time-with-benefits basis. The Board hires counsel to deal with bond issuances as needed.

Board members are required under the Illinois Public Community College Act to undergo professional development leadership training during the first, third, and fifth year of their terms. Topics may include such subjects as open meetings, community colleges and labor, freedom of information, ethics, sexual violence on campus, financial oversight and accountability, and others. Completed trainings are noted on the college's website. The board also approves policy and procedure, the college catalog, new or terminated curricula, and monthly expenses.

The board holds an annual workshop as well, providing an opportunity to hear and discuss topics such as the college's financial situation, new projects, updates from various departments, and other relevant information. Section One of the RLC Policy Manual deals entirely with board of trustees and administrative functions.

RLC is a member of the ICCTA Southeast Region Trustees, made up of the Boards and administrations of four neighboring community colleges. Meetings are hosted on a rotating basis

at each college and include discussions on pertinent topics and state-level updates from ICCTA staff (notice).

The Board maintains its fiduciary obligations. The Board appoints the college President (Policy 3.1005), but otherwise members of the Board do not sit on standing committees of the college and are not involved in the college's day-to-day operations. The Board periodically evaluates the President as dictated by his contract, which is available along with the evaluation instrument on the college's website. The Board also sets policy for overall governance.

2C2

The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution. The RLC Board of Trustees, governed by the Illinois Public Community College Act, consists of seven trustees elected to six-year terms and a student trustee elected to a one-year term. The Board approves several documents important to the preservation and enhancement of the institution, including the annual budget, the Resource Allocation and Management Plan, and the College District Site and Construction Master Plan.

In 2016, the Board made the decision to increase the college's tuition by \$15 to \$110 per credit hour (Feb. 2016 minutes), and it has not increased since then. Universal fees have increased in that time, most recently by \$15 per credit hour to account for the new all-inclusive textbook program (minutes).

Examples of recent board deliberations to preserve and enhance the institution include the renovation of the Aquatics Center into the Event Center, discussed in **2A**, the bond issuances discussed in **5B**, and the purchase of a new ERP system (board minutes).

Board meetings are open to the public as required by law, with agendas distributed to area media and posted online and on bulletin boards in the Event Center, where the meetings are held, as well as in the Administration Building, which houses the President's Office. The Board conducts as much discussion as feasible in open session, and spends less time in closed session under the current administration than in years past. If there is no business worthy of closed session discussion, a closed session is not held, although it is a standing agenda item. Minutes, packets and agendas of previous meetings for the past several years are available on the college website.

2C3

The college's Board of Trustees has the opportunity to hear multiple reports at each monthly meeting (agenda example, minutes). These include reports from the RLC Foundation, the Illinois Community College Trustees Association board representative, the Academic Council, an accreditation update and comments from the college President. Public comment also is a standing agenda item. The Board receives additional reports as needed, such as reports on the annual audit, and departmental presentations such as the entrepreneurship program, First-Year Experience, instructional design, and others. On the occasions of approval of the annual budget,

truth in taxation matters and bond issuances, public hearings are held at which the public is invited to give comment.

An example of Board consideration is the selection of a new college president. During the most recent process in 2012, candidates were interviewed not only by the Board, but by President's Cabinet, faculty, and staff. The Board considered the input of each of these three groups before making a final decision on an appointment. Another is the revision of the RLC Policy Manual. This was done by a committee, reviewed by President's Cabinet and eventually was taken to the Board in sections over a period of months, from March to July 2017 (agendas). This was intended to allow the Board ample time to review the sections of the revised manual prior to voting on approval.

The District Site and Construction Master Plan was created based in part on input received from both internal and external constituents, including students, employees and the community. The Master Plan serves as a guide for RLC's constructed environment and is intended to help guide and establish priorities for future expansion.

2C4

Preservation of the Board's independence from undue influence is addressed in multiple ways. The Board of Trustees Code of Ethics policy (1.1320) is based in large part on relevant state regulations such as the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act and addresses such things as prohibited political activities, a ban on gifts, confidentiality and others. All board members are required annually to submit a statement of economic interest disclosing pertinent information such as official capacities in professional organizations in which a certain level of pay is received, rendering of professional services to units of government for pay in excess of a particular level, and more.

Donations for scholarships and college improvements are handled by the Rend Lake College Foundation, a corporate entity separate from the college which operates under a memorandum of understanding with the college and is governed by a separate Board of Directors (sample minutes) with accompanying bylaws. The MOU states there is a limit of two people who can serve on both the RLC Board of Trustees and the RLC Foundation Board of Directors at any given time. The college President sits on the Foundation Board as an ex-officio non-voting member, and thus can keep the Foundation Board apprised of institutional perspectives and happenings.

2C5

Daily management of RLC is delegated to the administration. Evidence of this comes partially by what is not present. There are no standing institutional committees, councils or other bodies on which board members maintain a presence, other than when there is a presidential search. The

Board does not have an office on campus. The President is responsible for the overall operation and general administration of the college (Policy 1.5100) and is responsible to the Board for the total college program. Day-to-day operation is facilitated by administrators, who share a set of common duties and responsibilities (Policy 1.5200). The President's Executive Leadership Team (PELT) serves as the senior administrative decision-making body at RLC (Policy 1.5310) and typically meets once per week. The principal advisory group to the PELT is President's Cabinet (Policy 1.5305), which generally meets every other week.

The Board does not directly dictate the college's education program. The Board does approve curricular actions and authorizes their submission to the Illinois Community College Board for action, but these originate from the Academic Council or the office of the Vice President of Instruction and Student Affairs. During monthly Board of Trustees meetings, the Academic Council holds a standing agenda item to report on the group's activities. Policy 1.1305, Item S, dictates that the Board will consider and act upon program and curricular offerings of the college. The college's Academic Council (AC Bylaws) is tasked with studying matters relating to education, including initiation of new programs, graduation requirements, recommendation for classroom and technological enhancements.

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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.

Argument

2D

The institution is committed to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning. Rend Lake College's policy on academic freedom is explicitly stated in the Faculty Contract (Article IX, Academic Freedom). It uses the American Association of University Professors' definition as a model and outlines the freedoms and limited restrictions on the content of research and discourse. Academic freedom is also referenced as a principle in the college's Anti-Discrimination Policy, which is found in the RLC Policy Manual, Student Handbook, Employee Handbook, and on the college's website. The principal mechanisms to address academic freedom grievances and complaints is through the college's Academic Council; however, no concerns have been discussed for over fifteen years. No union grievances or concerns have been documented in a similar time frame. Two recent faculty surveys, 2018 and 2022, revealed few specific concerns. The 2018 survey indicated that 96% of full-time faculty and 98% of part-time/dual credit faculty had no concerns with academic freedom. The 2022 follow up survey revealed 80% of full-time faculty had no concerns; the individual responses regarding concerns were mostly broad reaffirmations of its importance, with only a couple of responses noting a specific issue (Academic Freedom Survey 2018, Academic Freedom Survey 2022).

The college recognizes that the uniformity of a course's content achieved through a master syllabus and required texts needs to be implemented under the fundamental principle of academic freedom. Therefore, the college opens up discourse on syllabi, textbooks, and course content with faculty, including dual credit and part-time, through the annual Faculty Orientation Day, as well as other programmatic and faculty development processes like strategic planning, Student Success Day, and advisory committees.

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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.

Argument

2E1

Scholarly research is not part of RLC's mission. Research and publication traditionally performed at research institutions is infrequent; however, review of full-time faculty research and publication occurs through the salary movement process as outlined in **3C4**. The Vice President of Instruction and Student Affairs will review the nature of research and the quality of published work before final approval for salary movement.

A number of policies guide ethical information management for college personnel. Policies on grant management are found in Section Five of the RLC Policy Manual, beginning with Policy 5.1600. The LRC keeps an updated list of public performance right holdings. It is the responsibility of the LRC to seek out those materials that have "educational use" licensing to ensure only those materials are checked out for any public screenings of digital media. Notice of federal copyright law is posted on public copiers, in computer labs, near library learning pods, and on the LRC web page. Our library web page links to fair use and digital media laws. The student Academic Integrity Policy includes a definition and explanation of consequences of all forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism. A notification and referral to the Academic Integrity Policy is included on all instructor syllabi (Integrity-Syllabus). Use of electronic services and resources is governed by an Access to Electronic Network Policy which is in the Student Handbook and is referenced on start up of all public access computers. Additionally, the college requires faculty and staff to undergo FERPA training annually through training partner Vector Solutions.

2E2

Library staff are available to help students one-on-one and the main open computer lab is conveniently located directly in front of the circulation desk and technology Help Desk. By request, library staff also visit high school dual credit classrooms to discuss research. They

maintain an index of college research databases in our A-Z Electronic Library, which includes JSTOR, Ebscohost, SIRS Researcher; E-newspapers, ebook databases, and film libraries. LRC web pages include links to three resources that help students evaluate the quality of research (Applying the CRAAP Test, Five W's of Website Evaluation, and SIFT to Find Quality Resources). A Library tile that parallels the library website is found within our Canvas LMS, providing students a convenient alternative means to access library resources. Links to most, but not all, online library resources are found here as well. A link to the college's plagiarism policy is found on the library web pages and on the Canvas tile.

2E3

Student research integrity is guided predominantly through the writing course sequence of ENGL 1101, required for all degree-seeking students, and ENGL 1102, required for A.A., A.S., A.F.A., and A.E.S. degrees. The Online Writing Lab at Purdue is used by all full-time English faculty and most part-time and dual credit. It is a primary resource for teaching research integrity through proper formatting and citation. An institutional Critical Thinking Resource Page and Written Communication Resource Page have also been developed. Both include resources on reliable information, media literacy, and research integrity (**see 4B2**). All English instructors, regardless of modality, are required to use a standardized syllabus and the approved textbook. The book and syllabus include standardized writing prompts. Four of the five required essays have research components. The syllabus also requires plagiarism be addressed and library resources be introduced (ENGL 1101 Syllabus). All sections of 1101 then teach basic research integrity while students write experiential essays in different rhetorical modes; English 1102, required for A.A., A.S., A.F.A., and A.E.S. degrees, is an argumentative research paper writing course. Work prepares students for conducting junior- and senior-level research and creating formal researched arguments. The course includes instruction on documentation systems, research methodology, using reliable sources, and media literacy (English 1102 Syllabus). The college's two freshman composition classes also include modules on reliable research. ORIE 1101, First Year Experience, is required of all degree-seeking students. It includes discussions on library policies and services, plus a demonstration on how to research professional databases. Students complete a discovery exercise on finding information from seven types of online sources (Library Assignment). The college's Employability Skills course, required for all CTE certificate students, includes material on plagiarism (Employability Skills Documents). ONE 1500, the required online learning module for students taking online and hybrid courses, includes a section on plagiarism (Plagiarism Materials). Fifty-five percent of full-time faculty incorporate research projects or papers in their courses (FT Faculty Survey 2022). Finally, library staff conduct sessions on using content-specific databases like CINHAL, EBSCO Health Source, and Gale Nursing Collection in NURS 1101.

The Canvas LMS platform includes a Turnitin feature available for use on any coursework. Commonly seen as a check for academic dishonesty, it is also used as an instructional tool for showing how unintentional plagiarism can occur if sources are not cited properly (Turnitin Usage).

2E4

The Academic Integrity Policy gives “full authority” to each faculty member for identifying and establishing a course of action in response to student dishonesty. If an incident is severe enough to warrant failure in the course or withdrawal, clear procedural steps outlined in the code are followed; however, most cases of academic dishonesty are handled at the instructor level. Documentation of incidents are kept in instructor files. Any notes regarding dean interventions between student and faculty are found in respective division files. More significant cases of academic misconduct are documented through the informal complaint process that specifically tracks plagiarism. (Academic Integrity Incident Logs). Several incidents of plagiarism and actions taken have been documented on these forms since 2018. A 2022 faculty survey indicates inconsistencies in documentation of incidents at the instructor level (2022 Faculty Survey). The college is exploring how to implement a consistent documentation archive for faculty.

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2.S - Criterion 2 - Summary

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

Summary

Rend Lake College maintains strong policies concerning ethical behavior on the part of both employees and the Board. The RLC Policy Manual was reviewed, updated, and approved by the Board in 2017, and this process is occurring again as of this writing. The Board takes an eyes-on, hands-off approach, remaining engaged and knowledgeable while leaving the day-to-day operations to the administration. College audits have consistently shown no material weaknesses, and any noted deficiencies have been corrected.

The college has a strong stance on academic freedom spelled out in the faculty contract. The academic integrity statement is available in multiple locations, including every course syllabus provided to students.

The college has improved its efforts at transparency and disclosure. Initiatives here include the creation of the RLC Achieves web page and the addition of program cost sheets. RLC's website was redesigned several years ago, and plans are underway to re-design it to improve navigation and clarity.

Sources

There are no sources.

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).

Argument

3A1

Through the college's academic governing body, the Academic Council, curriculum is approved, modified, and discontinued systematically (AC bylaws). A Curriculum Approval Form or Course Approval Form is used when deans or faculty members propose changes to programs/courses or initiate new programs/courses. These approval forms require both learner outcomes and assessment methods information. Then, the Curriculum Committee reviews those documents. If concerns are expressed, the proposal is tabled until those concerns are researched and addressed. After the Curriculum Committee approves a course/curriculum, the Academic Council entertains discussion and comment, with the originator of the proposal justifying cause in formal committee. Discussion and a vote follows (Academic Council Minutes April 2018). A "no" vote sends the curriculum/course back to the Curriculum Committee or the course is approved under the condition of revision. With Academic Council approval, the Academic Council Chair presents the proposal with justifications to the Board of Trustees. After ICCB approval, when applicable, other accreditation agencies, including HLC, are sent appropriate documentation.

Withdrawing a course or discontinuing a program follows the same process (February 2023 Curriculum Meeting Minutes, March 2023 Academic Council Meeting Materials). To ensure discontinuing a program does not have unforeseen negative impact, executive leadership reviews any course or program slated for withdrawal. The annual call for college Catalog review by faculty and deans assures any changes made to curriculum are accurately reflected in public documents, including the Catalog and website (Call for Catalog Review).

Appropriate levels of student performance are regulated through several processes. The college enhanced its advisory committee process in 2017. Feedback from these committees, required by all career-technical education (CTE) programs, ensures both currency and appropriate student performance for certificate and degree levels. Each program relies on regional industry and business leaders to shape those expectations (Advisory Committees Roster), and the process results in content appropriate for programs. The Advisory Committee Meeting Manual was created in 2017 to improve consistency of both the process and results. As part of the process, job placement data is included for review during meetings (Advisory Meeting Agendas, Minutes, and Materials 2023). Advisory meetings minutes are also evidence that currency of content is a review priority (Automotive Advisory Board Minutes).

Also, recommendations generated from strategic planning SOAR documents result in curriculum updates and modifications (Culinary Arts SOAR 2023). President's Cabinet approves and prioritizes SOAR-generated actions for budgeting, including updating programs with new equipment and technology (Strategic Planning and Program Review).

Additionally, RLC faculty systematically review student performance levels through outcome mapping review. Faculty are asked to review the established level of proficiency -- "introduce," "reinforce" or "master" -- that is expected for student performance in their course and programs (see **4B1**).

For programs predominantly in the Allied Health and Applied Science and Technology divisions, program accreditation, state boards, and industry certification also serve as a means of assuring currency and appropriate performance levels (See **4A5-6**).

In 2014 the college began a comprehensive credit hour compliance inventory to ensure the student workload is appropriate for the credit hours generated. A Credit Hour Compliance Audit Form was created. It allows instructors to evaluate the amount and level of work required in a class. This form also calculates the amount of work outside the class, using the expectation of two hours of outside work for every lecture hour. It also factors in the complexity of reading assignments. Using this form, all courses, except for non-transferable credit courses, calculated workload. If the workload was in excess or below the appropriate amount for the credit hours generated, faculty worked with instructional deans to modify the course content or credit hours awarded. When completed, supervisors reviewed the results and suggested improvements. The process is now integrated into new course adoption and program review. All new credit courses have one year to complete a Credit Hour Compliance Form. The form is also revisited as part of program review. Since 2014 only one program, Cosmetology, needed to revise its curriculum when the process revealed the workload for several courses was significantly over the appropriate amount for the credit hours (Cosmetology Compliance Form). CTE divisions also use the compliance audit to assure proper alignment of credit hours to workload in their high credit hour courses (6-Credit-Hour Course Explanations). Since 2020, the college's new online course approval process includes a credit hour compliance audit. All out-of-compliance audits were revised with the help of the Instructional Designer, with most problems the result of data entry errors on the forms or a need to revise reading workloads. All reviewed courses since FY 2018 now fall within the appropriate workload parameters. The Vice President of Instruction and

Student Affairs office houses completed credit hour compliance audits and continually updates a master tracker checklist documenting the audits by modality (Master Tracker Checklist: CHC).

Transfer articulations include reviews of the appropriateness of student performance for the amount of course credit and degree level. For transfer students, the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) utilizes a specific set of criteria to organize and align transfer courses with other participating Illinois community colleges and universities. The IAI panels of state-wide educators review courses from a set of criteria, objectives, and course descriptions appropriate for their type (IAI Articulation Criteria Sample). New courses adopted by the college are submitted to the appropriate IAI panel for approval. Current IAI courses are called for panel review approximately every five years. IAI approval guarantees that courses with an IAI code will transfer from a two-year institution to any state senior institution or anywhere within the two-year system. RLC and senior institutions continue to have active articulation agreements and transfer guides. RLC is presently in agreements for many career technical programs with the most common transfer institutions. These agreements guarantee seamless student transfer to junior status within those programs (Articulation Agreements). A traditional articulation process is also still followed. The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) requires course-to-course articulation with senior institutions for non-IAI transfer courses. This process is initiated utilizing ICCB Form 13. In this process, the CollegeSource Transferology Lab is used to provide evidence from three senior institutions or the completed form and syllabi are sent to three senior institutions for approval. ICCB requires three articulation agreements per non-IAI course for the college to offer it. RLC analyzes all articulation agreements for re-submission in conjunction with the internal program review process on a five-year cycle, but changes in university articulation agreements may occur when programmatic change occurs at either institution.

3A2

RLC offers five associate degrees (Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Fine Arts, Associate in Engineering Science, and Associate in Applied Science) and numerous occupational certificates (Degrees and Certificates List). The college Catalog clearly differentiates career technical programs from baccalaureate transfer programs as well as the broad learning goals for certificates as opposed to degrees (Baccalaureate Transfer/CTE Programs). The Catalog provides a recommended Course Sequence for each degree and course descriptions that broadly define the main employment or transfer learning goals for each course (Course Descriptions).

Internally, learning goals are articulated as measurable outcomes. A college-wide shift to convert learning goals to measurable outcome language occurred during the 2008 self-study process. RLC has comprehensively articulated program learning goals as learning outcomes across the curriculum (Comprehensive Program Outcomes). **4B1-3** addresses how program outcomes are articulated, differentiated, mapped, and assessed. As of August 2018, all programs' web pages include program learning outcomes. All credit course syllabi are required to include mission as well as course, general education, and institutional outcomes (see **3A3** below).

3A3

Several measures assure a consistent quality of learning across location and modality. Faculty update course syllabi each semester for all active courses. In Fall 2022 instructors began using the Simple Syllabus platform within the Canvas LMS when melding their instructor-specific content to the institutionally required content. Automating the integration of the syllabus-building steps through the Simple Syllabus platform has provided increased consistency and improved document access. All material required by governing bodies and the institution—state board requirements, mission statement, learning outcomes etc.—are administratively updated through the Simple Syllabus portal when policy changes dictate. The result is this “master content” is used regardless of instructor status or mode of content delivery (Instructor Syllabi Samples Across Modalities). The syllabus-building process and results are carefully reviewed by the instructional designer, academic deans and the VP of Instruction and Student Affairs every semester. All current instructor syllabi are available in Canvas and are easily accessed within the Canvas LMS. Class-specific syllabi must be completed by the first day of class. Additionally, instructors are required to use the faculty-approved textbook, but they can augment it with additional texts.

Faculty oversee the quality of courses through the Academic Council. The Curriculum Committee of the Academic Council reviews syllabi for approval of new programs or courses for conformity to the master syllabus (Curriculum Committee Minutes 2022-2023); this group also reviews the syllabus template, recommending changes to all syllabi dependent on new regulatory guidelines for improved clarity. Approved curriculum syllabi are sent to Academic Council, then recommended to the college board.

Qualified faculty are also a means for assuring consistent program quality. Faculty qualifications are documented through a Faculty Qualification Policy that evolved directly from revised faculty qualification guidelines of the HLC and the ICCB (See **3C2**). All dual credit, part-time, and full-time faculty have original transcripts secured in HR.

When RLC began offering all online programs, as indicated in the 2013 Change of Status Visit Report, the college required any faculty teaching online to attend a similarly structured Instructional Methods Workshop or Instructional Methods class. Both the workshop and course continue to be taught; however, as online offerings increased, the workshop became voluntary rather than mandatory. The administration recognized these efforts alone were an inadequate assurance of quality and adopted a Quality Matters (QM) evaluative framework in 2016. An Online Learning Committee also became active at that time. The Quality Matters process was faculty-driven by internal review teams of instructors with online teaching experience led by the college's instructional designer who completed both QM Coordinator and rubric training. With the COVID shift to significantly more online and hybrid offerings, the process was revised once again to improve accountability and quality. The process to develop and teach an online class, or, in some cases, redevelop an online class, now involves a required online instructional methods class (Instructional Methods Syllabus), in-house review process modeled after Quality Matters review criteria (Online Course Review), and significant administrative input for improvement before approval. The instructional designer documents the status of each online course developed and reviewed Online Development Status Report).

The Murphy-Wall Pinckneyville Campus and the MarketPlace in Mt. Vernon are the college's additional locations. RLC ensures consistent quality across its off-site locations by centralized administrative oversight using regular instructional staff. Instructors there are drawn from the same pool of full-time and part-time instructors teaching courses on the main campus.

Educational modalities are included within the same budgeting, staffing and organizational divisions, also ensuring consistency. Dual credit and online courses are managed as part of three instructional divisions, not as separate programs. Online faculty are largely full-time faculty who teach traditional classes concurrently. 31% of full-time faculty teach at least one dual credit class.

The language in the college's formal agreements and partnerships affirms both consistent learning and quality. The college maintains dual credit agreements with 12 of its 13 in-district high schools (Sample Dual Credit Agreement), The Illinois Community College Board standardized community college reciprocal agreements starting in 2013. This process reduces barriers in enrollment for Illinois students while maintaining each college's autonomy (CAREER Agreement). Through the Illinois Consortium of International Studies and Programs, the college offers study abroad opportunities (ICISP Brochure). ICISP also provides professional development through two-week faculty exchanges and full semester teaching opportunities. Faculty at Christ Church Canterbury, RLC's primary education partner, have credit hour compliance forms on file, and classes are articulated for direct transferability.

Rend Lake College first entered into a partnership with Southeastern Illinois College in 2011. Initially, the schools partnered to co-offer low enrollment Spanish language courses taught by an SIC instructor while RLC students participated through remote learning. In 2017 the colleges created a shared Veterinary Assistant program and expanded faculty sharing in low enrollment courses and programs. Recent RLC shares include music, physics, history, and chemistry courses. In all cases students receive credit from their respective colleges. Staff are also shared, including IT personnel as well as skilled laborers on staff at RLC. The colleges are also sharing a mental health wellness counselor. Independence and ownership of resources and curriculum is governed by an Intergovernmental Agreement Document. Course consistency is guaranteed through the Illinois Articulation transfer portal and traditional articulation processes. In October 2022 the colleges co-developed a long range planning document (Alliance Document) which includes a biannual meeting schedule between the two boards and leadership teams (Joint Board Minutes October 2022, Executive Leadership Minutes April 2023). The presidents and the vice presidents of instruction have co-presented on this partnership at the HLC Annual Conferences in 2017, 2018 and 2022 (Sharing Not Snaring Powerpoint).

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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.

Argument

3B1

Rend Lake College's general education curriculum reflects the diverse purposes for which students come to the college as articulated in its mission documents (Diversity of Purpose). Students learn broad knowledge to achieve the mission-defined "common outcome" of success in pursuit of educational goals. The institutional and general education outcomes articulate learning expectations of the general education program. They define the breadth of knowledge every student is expected to obtain. These outcomes are pervasive throughout college materials including the Catalog, all syllabi, the website, the Student Handbook, and, in the case of the institutional outcomes, on the walls of our hallways.

All degrees include a series of electives and program-specific required courses emphasizing the modes of inquiry most applicable to the fields of study contained within them, but also include exposure to all approaches. The electives and requirements within a program's course sequence are made clear in the degree guides located in the college Catalog (degree worksheets). For example, the Associate of Arts, Science, Fine Arts, and Engineering Science degrees require at least 10 hours of science and math credits, all of which emphasize quantitative modes of inquiry and discovery of knowledge through experiment, computation, and lab work. Qualitative analysis, creative process, and textual analysis are also emphasized within those degrees, with Engineering Science requiring the least (three credits) and the A.A. requiring the most, with nine credits of Humanities and Fine Arts. Social and behavioral electives balance qualitative and quantitative modes of discovery, with at least three credit hours from these areas required for

every degree (Course Options for Gen Ed Requirements). A newly developed multicultural course elective is now required for all degree-seeking students (**see 3B3 below**).

One strong assurance of the appropriateness of general education to our offerings and degree levels is our participation in the state-wide Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI), which standardizes the General Education Core Curriculum (GECC). As outlined in 3A1, transfer courses are confirmed as freshman or sophomore level through IAI, with senior institutions reviewing standards. The GECC provides students the broad-based knowledge they need to successfully transfer and "assures transferring students that lower-division general education requirements ... have been satisfied" (Catalog, page 50). The general elective course offerings are also informed by requirements of the Illinois Community College Board for elective credit (ICCB Gen Ed Credit Policy).

3B2

RLC differentiates general education outcomes into two categories. Institutional outcomes are those specific to learning: critical thinking, problem-solving, oral communication, and written communication (CPOW). General education outcomes are specific to soft skills essential for student success (connections, authenticity and multiculturalism). In 2007, after a formal process that included campus-wide input, CPOW outcomes were formally adopted as part of our mission with language mirroring this Core Component: "every-degree seeking student should possess these skills."

The previous General Education Statement, though articulating the college's general education philosophy, needed to include measurable outcome language. In 2018 a working group comprised of DEI Committee members, along with the Vice President of Instruction and Student Affairs, developed three general education outcomes from the principles present in the General Education Statement, as well as from a review of recently revised mission documents. Those outcomes were revised through direct participation by the executive leadership team and presented to all faculty and staff for comment (College Comment Gen. Ed. Statement). The new General Education statement was adopted as policy in July 2020 (catalog addendum).

Outcome mapping indicates where these core general education outcomes occur across the curriculum, including co-curricular activities (General Education Mapping). Both institutional and program learning outcomes are reviewed systematically as part of assessment, advisory committees, and planning processes as outlined in 4B and 3A1. Annual advisory committee processes, explained in 3A1, also assure review of appropriateness of general education in career-technical degree programs and certificates.

3B3

Accompanying the development of a multicultural general education outcome was a concerted effort to expand and enhance DEI-related instruction. The result included several substantial improvements: (1) Six additional program outcomes focused on multiculturalism and diversity were developed (Multicultural Curriculum Update, Section One). (2) The multicultural outcome was mapped and a systematic assessment process developed (Multicultural Curriculum Update,

Section Two). (3) Finally, six courses developed substantial assignments focused on multicultural understanding (Multicultural Curriculum Update, Section Three). A 2018 survey of full-time, part-time, and dual credit faculty documents the varied means by which diversity is addressed in courses (Diversity Survey 2018). A follow up survey was conducted in 2022 (Diversity Survey 2022). In 2019 the college also began requiring degree-seeking students to take an elective designated as multicultural. A proposal was generated from the DEI Committee members that students should be required to take at least one three-credit-hour elective from a list of offerings designated by the college as “multicultural.” This group of courses was identified using the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) curriculum designations. The IAI aligns transfer courses with other participating Illinois community colleges and universities guaranteeing transferability for approved courses. IAI's course classification system uses an "N" designation for courses designed to examine aspects of human diversity from a non-Western perspective and a "D" for courses designed to examine aspects of human diversity within the United States. Using these definitions, the college identified seven existing courses as multicultural elective requirements. Of the courses currently articulated, four were designated "N," with two courses not IAI-articulated but whose content closely correlated to the IAI "D" designation: HIST 2106-Black American History and EDUC 1107-Diversity in Education. This multicultural requirement became policy in 2019 (Multicultural Elective Requirement). An eighth course, COMM 1106, Intercultural Communication, was added to the required electives list in 2022.

In Spring 2018, a revised Diversity Week was developed in partnership with ORIE 1101, First Year Experience. The diversity course module now revolves around students attending a series of guest speaker events, films, and faculty-led discussions (Diversity Week Student Responses). In 2022-23 FYE instructors and the Critical Thinking Assessment Sub-Committee worked on improving the FYE diversity module by adding a DEI Resource Page to the course that serves as a basic diversity training module (DEI Resource Page). Student understanding of equity and inclusivity was first assessed in Spring 2023 (see **4B2**).

3B4

The college mission does not include a research mandate, and scholarly publication is not required for professional advancement; however, faculty are active in their respective professional organizations, as documented by an annually updated Faculty Professional Development Form. Scholarly and creative research activities are reviewed as part of the salary movement process outlined in **3C4**. Recent professional service and publishing activity were documented in a 2022 faculty survey (Professional Service and Publishing).

Student authors and visual artists submit their best work to the college's art publication, *Lake*, which celebrates creative work by students, faculty, staff, alumni and the district community at large. The annual publication includes paintings, drawings and photography, as well as fiction (Lake Online Issue). Each issue culminates in a release party often with student music, recitations and testimonials. An alumni and employee visual art show was recently initiated which compliments the biennial Student Art Show and scholarship awards ceremony.

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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.

Argument

3C1

With the college's renewed commitment to equity, inclusivity, and diversity, as outlined in the 2020 focus report and evidenced in CC 1C and 3B2 of this document, significant improvements in DEI activities have occurred. Though RLC's faculty and staff include African American, Latinx, and other culturally and racially diverse employees, a diverse faculty and staff remains a concern. The college district's declining population demographics--93% white and only 15% college-educated--presents a challenge for regional diversity hiring. The college considers hiring diverse faculty and staff a priority.

3C2

Rend Lake College has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty to carry out instructional and non-instructional responsibilities.

Fall Enrollment	FTE	Student-to-faculty ratio
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Fall 2021-22	1510	17:1
Fall 2020-21	1430	17:1
Fall 2019-20	1676	18:1
Fall 2018-19	1896	19:1
Fall 2017-18	1921	17:1

Source: RLC Factbook

The average class size at RLC is small with some exceptions (Class Size Pie Chart). While class sizes of 30 or larger are not common, larger classes are found predominantly in introductory-level lecture courses such as Introduction to Psychology and freshman-level math classes.

For FY23, there are 48 full-time faculty members and 99 part-time instructors, excluding dual credit instructors. As student numbers declined (**see 5C5**), full- and part-time faculty numbers also declined. A policy of attrition and retirement incentives has resulted in no layoffs of full-time faculty and a consistent teacher-to-student ratio; however, since 2018 five full-time instructors have been hired, all of them in career-technical programs. There are 51 high-school-employed dual credit instructors, as well as 15 (35%) full-time and 8 part-time instructors teaching some dual credit classes (Comprehensive Faculty Roster).

Faculty turnover fluctuates from year-to-year. Recently, a significant number of faculty have transferred to administrative positions.

--FY2018: 7.81% 4 voluntarily terminated and 4 instructors retired

--FY2019: 13.11% 2 instructors voluntarily terminated, 5 instructors retired and 1 admin. transfer

--FY2020: 8.93% 2 instructors voluntarily terminated, 1 retired, and 2 admin. transfers

--FY2021: 3.70% 2 instructors retired

--FY2022: 6.38% 2 instructors retired, 1 admin. transfer

Source: Human Resources Office

Section 10.6 of the faculty contract outlines the nature of committee service for full-time faculty. To ensure that there are adequate instructors to fulfill all non-classroom responsibilities, the college attempts to employ at least one full-time lead for each program/content area. Lead faculty select texts for each program area, manage course syllabi, and oversee part-time and dual credit assessment activities. Faculty leads, however, are not always economically viable for programs that involve a small credit sequence or experience low enrollment. Adjuncts teach in most of these low-credit-hour certificate programs. In these cases lead faculty duties are handled

by instructional deans or the direct program supervisor. In other cases consistent low numbers result in no expectation of filling lead positions. Instructional deans permanently fill those roles (Administratively-Led Programs).

One of the most significant non-classroom duties for RLC faculty is student learning assessment. The college relies on faculty for all analysis and some organization of activity. RLC faculty assessment responsibilities, including cross-curricular peer mentoring, are described in **4B**. Though the process is time-intensive, the Canvas LMS allows for data collection to be completed by every course instructor, often including part-time and dual credit adjuncts. Full-time instructors then analyze and document learning improvements systematically.

Oversight of academic credentials is largely governed by policy as outlined in **3C3** below. Faculty participate by serving on full-time faculty hiring committees. Full-time faculty may be consulted in hiring decisions regarding adjuncts, but these decisions are largely made by instructional deans. As required by the faculty contract, Article 16.1, a salary placement committee for full-time faculty includes two baccalaureate transfer and two career tech faculty. This group evaluates a new hire's experience and credentials to establish placement on the salary schedule.

3C3

The college has established criteria for faculty qualifications based on the expectations of both the HLC and its state regulatory agency, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB Faculty Qualification Policy). The college Faculty Qualification Policy is revised as the guidelines change, with the latest update in April 2023.

Beginning in 2015, the college adopted formal procedures to review and approve faculty qualifications for existing faculty members and before the hiring of any new faculty. A comprehensive review was conducted in 2016. Instructors not meeting qualifications developed an educational plan and timeline on how to meet the qualification expectations (Faculty Qualifications Verification Form). Faculty who did not complete the educational plan were no longer employed as teachers. Moving forward, the college adopted the use of two forms to document faculty qualifications and professional development. The Faculty Qualification Forms are on file for all full- and part-time faculty. An annual Faculty Professional Development Form reaffirms degree levels and documents new certifications, licensures, and professional development activities. These forms are submitted by faculty annually on Faculty Orientation Day. The instructional deans, Associate Vice Presidents, and Vice President of Instruction and Student Affairs review and sign off on these forms. After supervisor review, they are housed in the HR Department.

The college's Faculty Qualification Policy addresses required qualifications for career-technical instructors of an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching and at least one level above the level at which they teach, except in programs for terminal degrees or when equivalent experience is established. This policy follows ICCB guidelines of 2,000 hours of work experience and appropriate recognizable credentials and demonstrated teaching competencies appropriate to the field of instruction.

The Vice President of Instruction and Student Affairs, Associate Vice Presidents, and the instructional deans reviewed all faculty qualifications when deciding whether or not to apply for the HLC five-year extension for meeting dual credit qualification expectations. There was, however, confusion about external governing agency expectations for faculty teaching general education courses. Administrators understood a master's degree in the discipline *or* a bachelor's degree with 18 hours of graduate work in the instructor's teaching discipline was the expectation by both the HLC and the college's state governing board, ICCB. Operating under this misunderstanding, they concluded all faculty who teach degree transfer courses met--or would meet by the Fall 2017 deadline--the expectations. This misunderstanding was discovered as part of a scheduled five-year recognition process by ICCB (ICCB Recognition Report). The most recent five-year recognition process by ICCB in 2022 required 2,000 hours of work experience for CTE faculty, in addition to the appropriate academic degree. Beginning in 2023, RLC updated its policy and will require 2,000 hours of work experience for new CTE faculty, regardless of their degree.

Currently, tracking faculty credentials and comparing with course schedules is a manual process with inefficiencies. The college is in the process of implementing a new ERP system, Colleague, which will improve this. Faculty records in the ERP system will include the courses they are approved to teach. Beginning Fall of 2024, instructional deans will only be able to assign faculty to courses that they have been approved to teach.

3C4

RLC Policy 3.1205 and Article XI of the faculty contract establish processes for the evaluation of all full-time tenured and non-tenured faculty. All tenured full-time faculty are observed in the classroom and evaluated by the appropriate instructional dean every three years (Faculty Evaluation Form). All non-tenured faculty are observed and evaluated every semester. The evaluation is comprehensive, covering all aspects of job performance and the process allows for a response to the evaluation by the faculty member (Self Evaluation Form).

Full-time and part-time instructors are evaluated by students using Class Climate evaluation tools administered through the Canvas LMS. Part-time instructors are evaluated with a Class Climate instrument on a rotating basis (Class Climate Part-Time). Tenured full-time instructors are evaluated through a separate Class Climate instrument in at least two courses per academic year (Class Climate Full-Time). Non-tenured faculty are evaluated in three classes each semester. At their discretion, deans follow up evaluations, no matter the type, with face-to-face meetings across all modalities to discuss any concerns revealed by results. For non-tenured faculty, both Class Climate results and classroom observations weigh heavily in tenure decisions.

Documentation for tenure denials and remediation plans reside in that instructor's personnel file in HR. RLC adopted the Class Climate survey process in 2018. The new process is more consistent across modalities and educational platforms, but the student participation percentages are low. The college is actively pursuing methods for increasing participation, including proctored survey time in traditional classrooms.

Supervisors evaluate continuing part-time instructors at their discretion. Instructional deans conduct classroom evaluations of new part-time instructors at least once their first semester and

conduct follow-up evaluations for faculty with noted concerns. All evaluations are securely housed in HR (Part-Time Evaluation Form).

College faculty complete observations of high school dual credit instructors. Division Deans set up dual credit observations for high school instructors on a three-year rotation unless circumstances warrant more frequency. Faculty observers may visit the dual credit classroom up to twice a semester. If the dual credit class is a part of a program that does not have a lead full-time instructor, the dean completes the observation. During an observation, full-time faculty or deans ensure the syllabus is being followed and observe classroom dynamics. This process gives full-time faculty an opportunity to establish a rapport with dual credit instructors and students; however, observations can inform termination and remedial action. Completed class observation forms are kept in each dual credit instructor's personnel file in the appropriate dean's office (Dual Credit Observation Form).

3C5

The college incentivizes continued professional development for full-time faculty through the salary movement process outlined in Article 16.6 of the faculty contract and Policy 3.1235. All professional development is pre-approved through a salary movement process that follows the administrative approval of a Salary Movement Form. As follow-up, faculty provide proof of completion. The college supports broad opportunities for professional improvement including appropriate work experience, course completion, travel, and relevant conference and workshop attendance. Changes in language starting in the 2013-2017 faculty contract codifies the approval of professional publication and conference presentations to improve consistency (Section 16.6).

Two ongoing courses have been approved through ICCB and offered to faculty for professional development, with one, Instructional Methods and Strategies, on a consistent annual rotation since its approval. Leadership I and II were recently merged and rearticulated to be one repeatable class, LEAD 1600. It is open to faculty and staff, full- and part-time, and is geared toward developing leadership qualities modeled on the Chair Academy (LEAD 1600 Syllabus).

Faculty externships in career-technical programs are offered to both full- and part-time faculty. In July 2018 the college created a faculty development fund for all faculty, including dual credit and part-time instructors. The FY23 budget for this fund is \$40,000; money is released on a first-come, first-served basis (Professional Development Request Form).

3C6

All instructors are required to provide contact information on their course syllabus provided to the students; they are updated each semester.

In addition to required contact information on the syllabi, as regulated by Section 10.4 of the faculty contract, full-time instructors are required to hold physical office hours five hours each week. Those hours are subject to approval by their direct supervisor. Contract language states these hours should "provide maximum convenience for students." Administrative approval is intended to ensure student convenience. Article 10.4 also outlines the college's office hours

policy. Adopted in 2015, it allows instructors to keep one “virtual” office hour for every three online credit hours assigned, with no more than two virtual office hours allowed (Office Hour Policy).

During the annual Faculty Orientation Day, preferred contact information is gathered and updated for all faculty, including dual credit and part-time instructors. Administrative assistants for the instructional deans maintain a record of all faculty contact information, including dual credit, and make available class schedules and office hours for full- and part-time on-campus instructors upon student request. Office hours are posted on all full-time faculty doors by the end of week one. Both the RLC Catalog and college website provide contact information for full-time faculty (Contact Information).

3C7

All student support staff are appropriately qualified. The hiring process adheres to the college policies outlined in **2A** and **3C2**.

The Employee Recommendation Form, transcripts, and board packet recommendations demonstrate appropriate qualifications. Additionally, staff degrees are listed in the Catalog pages 174-177. All support staff now complete an annual professional development form which is used to document professional credentialing and development activities.

Notable trainings include active shooter, poverty, emerging leadership, CPR, Strengths-based learning and stress management. TRIO staff attend annual Council of Opportunity in Education and legislation and regulation training. Financial Aid personnel attend the annual Illinois Association of Student Financial Administrators Conference and train through the Association of Veterans Education Certifying Officials.

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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).

Argument

3D1

Student support services are suited to the needs of our student population as understood through our enrollment profile and similar documents. Services include the Academic Advisement Center, Financial Aid Office, Career Center, and Testing and Placement Center. The Dean of Enrollment Services and three advisors oversee registration processes. Remote, phone, and face-to-face advisement is available, and advisors travel to high schools and extension sites to enroll dual credit and dual enrollment students.

The Financial Aid Office includes a Director and two specialists who provide assistance in completing the FAFSA and determining need-based federal and state aid, as well as related functions, such as encouraging students to apply for Foundation scholarships. Veterans Services also are provided here.

Career Services assists students with career planning. They receive help by drop-in, referral, and as part of ORIE 1101 (FYE Career Planning Module). Professional development workshops are held twice a semester for graduating students. The Center also maintains the employment opportunities web page.

The Testing and Placement Center provides placement and other testing: CLEP, Pearson-VUE, Certiport, and the Illinois Certified Nurse Assistant Test. An explanation of placement procedures is outlined in **3D2**.

Student success support includes a Learning Enhancement Center, CTE Success Center, federally-funded TRIO programs, a First Year Experience course, and several non-academic support services and retention initiatives.

The Learning Enhancement Center (LEC) includes writing, math and oral communication tutoring labs, plus other on-demand tutoring. LEC programs are explained in detail below **(3D2)**. The Coordinator of Learning Enhancement and CTE Success Centers also serves as the Disabilities Coordinator, and provides counseling and Strengths-based learning assessments for at-risk students.

ORIE 1101 (First Year Experience) was the focus for RLC's initial HLC Quality Initiative. One of the main objectives of the FYE program is to improve student engagement, while introducing them to key areas such as tutoring, library services, advisement, financial aid, and career services (ORIE 1101 Syllabus).

Federal TRIO programs include Student Transfer and Retention Support (STARS) and Upward Bound. STARS provides academic support each year for up to 160 RLC students who are first-generation, low-income, or disabled. Upward Bound serves ninth- through twelfth-grade students attending Benton, Hamilton County, Zeigler-Royalton and Mt. Vernon high schools.

Enrollment profile data, supported by withdrawal data, and other district demographics, including the high percentage of first-generation students and those living in poverty, clearly indicate many non-academic factors prevent student success. In response, student success and enrollment management staff have improved support processes and initiated interventions designed to mitigate social barriers, including the following:

A Food Pantry is stocked by donations from campus staff, faculty, and the community. A request form on the college website provides a discreet process for student access (Food Pantry Application).

RL-Cares (Consultation, Advisement, Referral, Exploration, Success) is a mostly non-academic consultation service providing help for students outside the advisement process. Initially, students learned about RL-Cares in ORIE 1101. All course syllabi also include contact information. During COVID a concerted effort was made for RL-Cares to become a single access point for all RLC student need, including technology. RL-Cares developed a more systematic internal referral process and successfully increased visibility through student email, the college website, marketing, announcements, and contact with individual students. Post-COVID, faculty, staff, and students need only remember one agency for help (RL-Cares Tracking Sheets).

The Student Emergency Fund provides help for students who face financial difficulties not covered by financial aid. Though housed in Student Success and Development, it is monitored by an approval committee including academic support staff. Funding is exclusively from monies raised by employees. Examples of assistance include giving financial help to those who have been a victim of fires, giving students gas cards who have not received their financial aid refund,

and purchasing scrubs for nursing students who could not afford them for clinicals (Emergency Fund Form).

An improved early alert process automates the previous pen-and-paper system. Faculty now submit student attendance and performance issues from within the Canvas LMS. Daily attendance is reviewed weekly by RL-Cares staff as well as financial aid staff when appropriate. During week four, an automated email request for TRIO students and athletes is sent to faculty, asking them to check any of the at-risk indicators that may apply. For other students, a Faculty-Initiated Early Alert Form process also originates from within Canvas. Support staff members contact students to offer assistance. Coaches are also contacted regarding athletes.

Additional economic and social support services include the RLC Foundation and the Foundation Children's Center. As outlined in **2C3**, the RLC Foundation is a financial support entity associated with but separate from college operations. They provide funding for scholarships and capital projects.

The Foundation Children's Center provides child care services. The preschool has been awarded the Preschool All-Illinois State Board of Education Grant continuously since 2005. This grant provides childhood education experiences for at-risk preschool children. The Center is an Excellence-Rate Illinois' Gold Circle of Quality member and also serves as a learning lab for Early Childhood Education students; a lead teacher and the director provide instruction in that program.

Another support initiative includes a process to charge public transportation to a student's Pell Grant after all other semester expenses are paid. The RLC Wellness Center is discussed in **IC2**.

Our additional locations, Murphy-Wall Pinckneyville Campus and the MarketPlace in Mt. Vernon, offer an on-site representative who can register students, advise, and serve as a referral point for those services available only on campus, such as textbooks and financial aid advisement. The RLC MarketPlace also provides a location for placement testing upon request. On-campus hours are extended for many services including advisement (the week before and first week of classes fall and spring); Math Lab and Writing Center vary each semester but usually include late night hours weekly. With the Canvas LMS, students receive 24-hour online Canvas tech support. Online support also includes Writing Center access through email. Our COVID response standardized multiple ways to register including distance advisement and registration through phone conference, video conference, or email. Zoom video has been made available for online program advisement.

3D2

Like many colleges, Rend Lake College moved away from a sequential developmental program to a co-requisite Accelerated Learning Program for English courses in 2016 and began the process with math in 2021. Contemporary College Mathematics (MATH 1107) and Math for Elementary Teachers I (MATH 1130) currently have a co-requisite Accelerated Learning Program, and there are plans to develop a co-requisite for College Algebra (MATH 1108) and Statistics (MATH 1111). The college is in the process of partnering with local high schools to

develop and implement transitional English and math high school courses (Transitional Courses Update). This new placement measure was developed following the Illinois State Board of Education's guidelines including the core objective “to improve high school student workforce and college readiness and avoid remedial courses for students entering college from high school.” In 2019, RLC was awarded a grant by ICCB to fund articulations and partnerships with local high schools and start-up costs of the program. A transitional math course curriculum was co-developed by high school and college math teachers and submitted to the state portability panel in 2020. The pilot course was taught Fall 2021 with our high school partner, Hamilton County Unit District 10 (Transitional Math Syllabus). The transitional English course curriculum has been co-developed with several local high schools, including the Pinckneyville District high school. Pinckneyville will pilot the course Fall 2023 pending state approval (Transitional English Syllabus).

When placement testing, the college uses ACCUPLACER to determine whether a student is placed into the college’s co-requisite English, math, or developmental math courses. The college also recognizes ACT and SAT scores. In-district high school students have the opportunity to be tested at their high school. All students are allowed two testing attempts (Placement Testing Chart). As the college makes a transition away from sole placement testing, administrative review of placement on a case-by-case basis is performed in many instances. In this new process, students with borderline placement scores have their scores reviewed along with other multiple measures and are placed outside the developmental course sequence whenever possible. Other measures used for placement are high school GPA and course grades from senior-year English.

Students not meeting the minimum standard placement scores in English are enrolled in ENGL 1101 and ENGL 1411 concurrently their first semester. Students must earn a ‘C’ or better in both ENGL 1101 and ENGL 1411 to have met the course standards when working towards all degrees except the Applied Science degree. Students in these degree programs may earn a minimum of a ‘D’ in ENGL 1101 and a ‘C’ in ENGL 1411. Success results are linked to in section **4C2**. Degree-seeking students must also place into the appropriate math level. Placement in the math course sequence is dependent on both major and ACCUPLACER score. Students must earn a minimum of a ‘C’ to have satisfied the requirement for entry into the next level math course (Math Placement Flowchart). Evidence of student success in college prep math is provided in **4C2**. RLC is preparing to pilot ALEKS PPL for math placement starting in July 2023 (Projected ALEKS Cut Scores).

As outlined in **3D1** above, the Learning Enhancement Center supports learning through three tutoring centers: writing, math and oral communication. All tutoring, which is provided free to students, is arranged by the Learning Enhancement and Career Technical Education Success Center Coordinator. The centers provide traditional walk-in tutoring services or by appointment in one-on-one and small group sessions. Total student contact hours for the last six school years are indicated below:

School Year	Fall Tutor Hours	Spring Tutor Hours	TOTAL
2016-2017	3,972	1,558	5,530
2017-2018	5,401	2,573	7,974
2018-2019	4,445	1,347	5,792

2019-2020	3,937	632	4,569
2020-2021	101	707	808

The LEC is also home for student athlete mandatory study hours. Each student athlete is required to spend three hours in the LEC their first semester with subsequent hours based on their earned GPA (Student Athlete LEC Policy). The Math Lab has a full-time instructor and part-time tutors, while the Writing Center and Communications Lab are staffed with part-time tutors. The college has seen an increased demand for services in the Math Lab where an additional tutor was added for advanced math courses and physics in December of 2021.

The Career Technical Education (CTE) Success Center is housed in the Learning Resource Center. In 2013, RLC was awarded a Title III grant supporting students in the Allied Health field. The CTE

Success Center, which provided focused tutoring and lab practice for students in Allied Health programs, was established. In Fall 2020, the center expanded to serve all CTE programs, not just Allied Health. Tutoring in the CTE Success Center now includes all of the CTE fields of study offered at the college.

Students needing support services contact the Learning Enhancement & Career Technical Education Success Coordinator. Tutoring services recently underwent program review. Results indicated the need to improve electronic access and hire additional staff (Program Review PowerPoint).

Disability Support Access Services provides student support out of the Learning Enhancement Center (LEC) and the Career Technical Education (CTE) Success Center. The CTE Success Center offers students with learning difficulties a distraction-reduced environment for testing and study. In addition, CTE students have access to a CTE success mentor/coach, who acts as an extra layer of support, bolstering the prospects of student success. All students, including those with disabilities, have access to speech-to-text dictation and digital reading capability through MS Word. Students are provided Microsoft Edge to read web-based documents aloud for them. Students who have difficulties with reading are provided free digital reading software and digital versions of textbooks on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, students may request their tests to be read aloud to them by LEC staff. In many cases, peer note-takers are procured by the LEC, and accommodate students with writing impairments and other disabilities. Assistive technology, along with the LEC staff, help accommodate students with disabilities when they take exams and work on projects.

The Adult Education and Literacy Program supports adult basic education, high school equivalency/general educational development, and job readiness. The program serves students 16 and older not enrolled in high school and who lack basic math and reading skills. All Adult Education and Literacy classes are offered free of charge to students (Adult Education Materials)

To better serve a rural, first-generation population that is sometimes both economically challenged and without internet access, RLC's registration and advisement processes are conducted face-to-face, by phone, video conference or email (Registration Procedure).

The Academic Advisement Center maintains an appointment-only policy through most of the academic year. Priority registration appointments are grouped by student population, with earlier registration opportunities for veterans, TRIO students, student-athletes and student workers. Walk-in registrations take place two weeks prior to the start of fall and one week preceding the start of spring and summer.

Students schedule their Academic Advisement appointment online, allowing the availability of all advisors to be seen by students. They answer general questions, then a few academic-based questions including student type (first time, continuing, returning, high school), major, and transfer institution. This information allows Academic Advisors the ability to plan prior to the appointment, reviewing student transcripts and potential transfer guides.

Students showing a change of address from out-of-district to in-district are required to provide proof to confirm their in-district status. Students returning after leaving the college have their transcript reviewed on a case-by-case basis to ensure previous coursework counts toward their current program. Unofficial college transcripts, potential transfer coursework, placement testing, transfer plans, and articulation guides are all referenced for successful advisement. Academic plans are developed outlining coursework students need to meet their academic goal. Upon registration, academic advisors review the schedule with students and a new student advisement completion checklist is provided, then students are emailed a copy of their schedule to sign electronically. A separate email is then sent to students which includes attachments for the Starter Pack, IT Survival Guide, and Nelnet Flyer. The email also has links directing individuals to website information on scheduling an appointment, filing a financial aid application, and other RLC policy and resource materials.

Students enrolling in their first online or hybrid courses are enrolled in ONE 1500, Online Navigation Essentials. This non-credit course provides modules students will complete with the objective of making individuals more prepared for online learning. Students must successfully complete all modules of ONE 1500 no later than the first two weeks of the semester (ONE 1500 Overview).

During spring semester, academic advisors travel to in-district high schools providing on-site advisement and registration. Incoming freshmen receive the same services as those registered on-campus.

Faculty advisement takes place in varying levels in all academic divisions (Faculty Contacts for Programs). In most cases students are advised by a faculty member, then directed to Student Records for data entry. Since access to our ERP advisement module is not available to faculty, advisors within those programs submit an electronic registration form to Student Records. Students are not formally registered until academic plans are reviewed with the student and demographic information is updated. This process has eliminated incorrect data being entered by faculty and improved communication among all parties. For continuing students in the Applied

Science and Technology divisions, dates for faculty advisement are scheduled by program. Academic advisors join faculty advisors in their offices. This allows faculty to advise in their content areas while student service personnel complete data entry, clarify requirements, and inform on college procedures. Students within select programs such as Radiology and Nursing are advised and registered as cohorts. All students, regardless of major, receive a follow-up email to be signed electronically as well as the email with the important attachments and website links.

The vast majority of students are advised in person or virtually with an academic or faculty advisor; however, students obtaining a minimum of 30 credit hours and 2.5 grade point average can self-advise. Qualifying students can bypass advisors and register directly in the Student Records office. Self-advising students assume responsibility for knowing how classes impact progress to graduation (Self-Advisement Policy).

Student athletes are advised and registered by the Academic Advisement staff. Each team has their own advisor, allowing consistency. Advisors work directly with the appropriate coaches to determine practice times, travel schedules, and other pertinent information useful in the advisement process.

3D4

RLC has the space, infrastructure, and resources to successfully educate students. The campus and additional locations provide 122 classrooms and labs serving 5,413 duplicated students in FY 2022.

All on-campus classrooms have a networked, internet-accessible computer and one or more graphic displays, which may be either projectors, digital monitors, or smart boards. Many rooms also feature webcams and Zoom capabilities, discussed further below.

Many computer labs are dual-purpose, serving as open labs for students when classes are not being held in the room (Computer Labs by Location). Specialized technology labs include a robotics lab, an automotive lab that is a simulated automotive service center, and a manufacturing lab with high-tech machining equipment including a CNC plasma cutter, laser etcher, and milling machine (Specialized Technology Labs).

The process for replacement of obsolete technology is fluid, based on budget and planning requests, program need, age and other technology priorities. About 100 computers, including 40 instructor computers in classrooms, were replaced in FY 2021, and about 60 computers were replaced in FY 2022. The IT Department developed a projection of resource allocations that helps anticipate major technology projects (IT Road Map). Additionally, in response to student and faculty feedback, the college took over the previously outsourced campus wireless network in 2016. Improvements to service since then include seamless connectivity when moving across campus. In 2018, the college took over the Wi-Fi in our additional locations (Mt. Vernon and Pinckneyville), and Spring 2023, IT completed a near-total refresh of the Wi-Fi access points to bring us up to current WI-FI standards. During the COVID shutdown, we used some stimulus funds to deploy Wi-Fi access points around our parking lots to give students greater access under

quarantine restrictions. In 2022, a new onboarding procedure was deployed to allow users to log on to our Wi-Fi network via email or text message confirmation.

Additional improvements include a near-total refresh of network switches using COVID stimulus funds as well as new fiber connections which enabled 10GBS speeds between several campus buildings. Webcams were installed in many classrooms. Online ordering and shipping of textbooks was configured and implemented, and remains an option today.

Over the last three years there has been a significant increase of distance learning space, and Zoom technology has replaced previous distance learning systems. "Zoom rooms" are organized to accommodate on-campus attendance of classes with remote instruction. "Hyflex rooms" are organized to support in-person instruction with some, or all, remote student attendance. Additionally, the college has mobile Zoom carts for events or to create a temporary distance learning space. One Polycom-configured distance learning room remains with an additional Webber high school location. Regardless of the room set-up, distance learning can now occur in over 50 instructional spaces. (Distance Learning Spaces).

IT supports students and instructors throughout the various learning environments. The college's instructional designer conducts software training, oversees online instruction quality control, and manages the assessment documentation system. In July 2018, the college entered into a agreement with Instructure for use of their Canvas LMS, starting in Fall 2018. The agreement includes 24/7 tech support for our students. Various other technological support comes in the form of student access to apps, such as Microsoft 365. The college also offers the RLC App, a one-stop access point for RLC electronic student services. During COVID a broader laptop and webcam loaner program was initiated and continues. It now serves all students, faculty, and staff. Students can charge the refundable loaner fee to financial aid. The Information Service Request System documents all significant employee requests for service (ISR Report). For students, the IT help desk provides information on how to access and use college resources relevant to classroom and support services such as password resets and step-by-step instructions (Help Desk Student Call Log).

The Learning Resource Center is centrally located on campus and serves thousands in an increasingly online environment (Learning Resource Center Data). It participates in the Illinois Heartland Library System and is the location of the main open computer lab. Private study areas and several learning pods provide informal work space for on-campus students. A full-time director of the Learning Resource Center, along with two part-time library specialists, oversees organization of resources, including the website and electronic database main page. Currently, the LRC has a subscription budget of \$50,323.18 FY22. The oversight process for learning resources is further discussed in 4A4.

Clinical practice sites include an extensive list of locations across the district (Clinical Sites List). RLC also has five simulated clinical classroom sites, including three clinical classrooms in the Learning Resource Center (nursing and CNA) and two in the Advanced Technology Center (Radiologic Technology and Medical Assistant). The college also has three labs at the Mt. Vernon MarketPlace, one Emergency Medical Technician lab, and two CNA labs.

There are four recent repurposings of RLC campus spaces: A significant renovation to the library occurred in 2021-2022, resulting in the Mary and George Slankard Learning Resource Center which includes expanded student space, outside study areas, a renovated Career Technical Education Success Center, Wellness Room, six state-of-the-art collaborative study rooms, a Children's Library and the Blended Coffee Shop (Slankard Center Press). A \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration will help establish the Southern Illinois Manufacturing Academy (SIMA), a manufacturing training center at our additional location, the RLC Marketplace in Mt. Vernon. Rend Lake College, Kaskaskia College, and Southeastern Illinois College will collaborate on outreach, enrollment, training, employer engagement, and job placement throughout Southern Illinois (Manufacturing Academy Press). The Agronomy Innovation Center (previously the Coal Mining Training Center) includes classrooms and state-of-the-art John Deere equipment for agriculture applications and operations training. Curriculum includes hands-on training for students and retail partners to equip them with certifications within their respective fields. The Agronomy Innovation Center will be the primary facility for future Agriculture Technology (Agronomy Center Press). A new event center is the most recent renovated space. The college's Aquatic Center was underutilized and costly. It was repurposed as an event center (Event Center Press).

There are five science labs on campus and an additional lab at our Pinckneyville location. Fine art spaces include theatre and music performance spaces and a stained-glass and ceramics art room. Other spaces of note include the Bookstore, located in the Academic Building, renovated in 2023. A 1,500-square-foot multi-purpose room expansion for the Children's Center was completed in 2016.

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3.S - Criterion 3 - Summary

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

Summary

Degree programs at Rend Lake College are appropriate to higher education as indicated by the formal review processes in place, including the curriculum governance processes of the Academic Council; input from Advisory Committees, ICCB, and IBHE; and several articulation processes. The development of a credit-hour compliance review system assures the appropriateness of college course work for credit hours awarded. The college clearly articulates the expected learning outcomes for courses, programs and the institution. Its publications explain the different expectations for certificates and degrees. Outcomes mapping across the curriculum also helps confirm appropriate student performance for courses, programs and degrees. The adoption of the Simple Syllabus process improves consistency across modalities.

The broad learning that constitutes general education is defined in seven outcomes: the institutional learning outcomes (CPOW) and the value-centric general education outcomes. Assessment of student performance in these outcomes ensures they remain the core of our students' education.

Committed faculty and support staff are in place for successful student learning. The college endeavors to keep one full-time faculty employed in every major program area for stability, quality control, and administrative consistency. Deans perform many administrative duties for any part-time led programs. The college's qualification policy conforms to ICCB and HLC requirements, but the college had one undercredentialed faculty on staff during the 2021 Illinois Community College Recognition review. The college has taken measures to address this issue.

One of the central tenants of the college's mission, that we are student-focused, drives the student services provided by the college, as demonstrated by the nature and breadth of support services we provide. A shift in focus from non-traditional and low-income service to focus on protected classes is in process; creation and improvement in our wellness initiatives is a notable example of this.

Sources

There are no sources.

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.

Argument

4A1

A five-year cycle of program review mirrors the Illinois Community College Board's (ICCB) review schedule. The review is part of RLC's planning process and conforms to this regulatory agency's reporting expectations (RLC Current Five Year Review Plan). Review teams are led by the appropriate instructional dean or fiscal manager and conducted by their faculty or staff, with support from administrative leads (RLC Guidelines for Program Review).

For academic program reviews, elements include evaluating program quality, reaffirming the appropriateness of content, reviewing course articulations, and updating program objectives and learner outcomes as warranted. Course descriptions are reviewed, program cost and need are analyzed, and improvements are documented, including rationales for further actions and expenditures (Culinary Arts Program Review). If the program review results in a change to the

sequence of courses or courses offered, these changes are submitted to the Curriculum Committee of the Academic Council to undergo its formal approval process. Final results of reviews, using the program-specific ICCB templates, are submitted annually to the ICCB by September 1, as required. Non-academic program reviews exclude much of the instructional and student assessment data but require well-developed and thorough responses to the ICCB review questions (Business Office Program Review). Until 2017, review summaries were sent to ICCB following a single-page form. A revised ICCB document expanded the information reported to that agency. Though the new form requires much of the same information that RLC was already gathering, it now requires disaggregated data, equity information, and a narrative about data gaps. To improve consistency and help faculty and staff navigate the new ICCB expectations, program review templates were created (Program Review Templates). These templates, along with the new ICCB review format, have resulted in more consistent documents that are of increased value to stakeholders. Also, these changes help the college better connect retention / completion data and learning assessment analysis to program review.

Internally, the President's Cabinet has been the body that analyzes program review results. Prior to being submitted to ICCB, the staff member responsible for the review leads Cabinet discussions of the findings. Beginning in Spring 2023, each program review committee now presents a summary of its review and findings using a presentation template. The presentation schedule is sent campus-wide and anyone interested can attend. Along with productivity reports from the Business Office and Advisory Committee reports, program reviews are used to help determine a program's viability. The information provided by the review is also used to justify program changes and note any learning assessment issues or changes required by the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) or ICCB.

Program review is informed by several other processes. Program advisory committees complete a survey as part of the process. The new ICCB template requires the inclusion of assessment methods and results, as well as more detailed persistence, retention, and completion data (Communications Program Review 2021). Conversely, program review results are integrated into other college activities. Program review plays a part in completing SOAR analyses during strategic planning as well as budget requests. In fact, the SOAR process of strategic planning often serves as an annual program review, generating some of the same data and analysis of program effectiveness. Beginning in 2017, an annual report is completed for each CTE program and presented to the Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee Annual Report). This new document provides an annual review of program data for the advisory constituents.

Starting in 2017 all program reviews that follow the new ICCB template are located on the college's Intranet SharePoint site. Prior reviews and supporting documentation are housed in Division Dean's offices.

4A2

The Director of Student Records / Registrar is responsible for the receipt and evaluation of all incoming transcript, CLEP, AP, International Baccalaureate Program, and proficiency credit as

well as appropriately documenting such credit on the RLC transcript. A transfer policy workflow has been created for our most common transfer colleges (Transfer Policy Workflow). Courses with a minimum grade of C from an approved, accredited institution will be considered for transfer credit. Credit hours, course content, and dean's recommendations, where necessary, are used to determine the transferability of courses. Transcripts which originate from uncommon transfer colleges are evaluated by searching that college's catalog on their website and evaluating the credit hours and course content, as well as obtaining instructor recommendations and dean approval when necessary. Whether or not a course is an Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) course is also a determinant of transferability. IAI is a statewide agreement on course transferability among more than 100 participating colleges (itransfer.org). All participating schools agree to accept articulated IAI courses.

When content of courses is uncertain or credit hour equivalency is hard to determine, the appropriate deans review transcripts. The final awarded credit relies heavily on their evaluation. Clear policies exist for evaluating and transcribing several experiential and alternative education processes, as evidenced by the public policies outlined below in **4A3**.

4A3

In order to assure quality, the Transfer Credit Procedure defines what credit is acceptable for transfer. It is located in the college Catalog (p. 50) and on the college website under Student Consumer Information.

Policies for transcribing occupational experiences such as military and state police service are articulated in the Catalog (Types of Credit p. 45). As a member of the Servicemembers Opportunities Consortium (1,700 members nationwide), RLC also adheres to their policies for evaluating military services for transcription of credit (SOC Policy). RLC has clear guidelines for college credit by examination including CLEP, high school advanced placement, and proficiency, international baccalaureate credit and credit through the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy (Advanced Credit and Proficiencies). A process for home-schooled student admissions is outlined in the Catalog (Pg. 20). RLC is also a participant in Transferology (www.transferology.com), which allows students to find statewide requirements and transferability information for courses (Catalog, p. 51).

4A4

The college maintains authority over all aspects of its educational processes. Instructional deans work closely with faculty who exercise and maintain authority over prerequisites, course content, and learning outcomes.

Authority over Prerequisites:

The establishment and review of prerequisites remains the propriety of faculty with support of the instructional deans. Through the faculty-led Academic Council curriculum process, faculty establish prerequisites as part of the development of new curriculum as described in **3A1**. The college Catalog is reviewed and updated annually. By request, faculty review their respective offerings in the Catalog and submit changes or errors in the listed prerequisites to the Vice President of Instruction and Student Affairs (Call for Catalog Review).

Rigor of Courses:

The Curriculum Committee of the Academic Council approves new courses after a thorough examination of justification, learning outcomes, formatting and assessment methods (Curriculum Approval Form). Once new curriculum is approved by the Curriculum Committee, the full Academic Council reviews and votes on its Curriculum Packet. Credit hour compliance has been completed for all courses currently taught as outlined extensively in **3A1** (Credit Hour Compliance Audit Form). Articulations with high school and university programs are designed to help assure proper coursework alignment, though meetings have become more infrequent. The development of dual credit and the Illinois Articulation Initiative process serve many of the same functions as face-to-face articulations. Recent articulations between high school and college instructors have occurred through the co-development of transitional English and math courses.

Authority and rigor are also maintained across all modalities. Dual credit and online offerings are not managed through separate offices and 35% of full-time instructors teach dual credit classes. Additionally, in the career technical fields, program Advisory Committees and other industry partnership meetings identify updates for training and skills for success of students in their respective career fields.

Expectations for Student Learning:

4B1 outlines the development process of program and institutional outcomes that define learning expectations. Institutional outcomes are articulated on all course syllabi and reviewed as part of annual assessment planning. Faculty systematically review and map program outcomes for appropriate levels of performance (see **4B3**). They make changes to learning based on analysis of student performance as documented in their annual assessment plans (**4B2**) as well as the result of strategic planning, online learning course review, and workplace expectations. Though there is no institutional grading standard, several departments do have documented definitions that are used by faculty in their department (English Grading Guidelines).

Access to Learning Resources:

As described in **4D4**, the Learning Resource Center is centrally located on campus and it is the location of the primary open computer lab. Website monitoring and annual headcount processes indicate it serves thousands a semester (Learning Resource Center Page Factbook). A full-time director, along with two part-time library specialists, oversee organization of resources including the website and electronic database main page. Since 2018 the library falls under the administration of the Associate VP of CTE and Student Support. The Learning Resource Center

Academic Council Committee bring together faculty with library staff to discuss library issues (LRC Meeting Minutes). Staff meetings are held frequently (Library Staff Meeting Minutes).

Decisions concerning other campus-wide resources of significant cost such as computer software, simulators or industrial equipment are made through strategic planning budgeting processes usually initiated by faculty. Decisions for instructional materials are made by faculty in consultation with the instructional deans and referencing the bookstore's policy for book rental. In the few cases where a program does not have a full-time instructor, instructional deans may make textbook and other resource decisions based on recommendations of adjunct faculty.

Faculty Qualifications:

The Vice President of Instruction and Student Affairs and instructional deans have undertaken a thorough process of evaluating faculty qualifications as documented in **3C2**, with HR ensuring the required faculty credentialing documents are on file (see **3B4**). These qualification expectations extend to our dual credit program, reciprocal agreements and college partnerships (see **3C1**).

Dual Credit:

Authority over dual credit instruction is maintained with expectations consistent with full- and part-time instruction as well as oversight integrated into divisions as opposed to separate departments. All dual credit classes are taught using the same text with the master syllabi and outcomes standardized for each course, regardless of modality. Full-time faculty mentors are often assigned to beginning dual credit instructors and sometimes asked to observe dual credit classrooms (see **3C3**). Dual credit instructors are included in faculty development opportunities, particularly the annual faculty orientation meeting at the beginning of the instructional year. An extensive peer observation and evaluation process is in place (see **3C4**).

4A5

A number of areas have accreditations that support the rigor of programs, many providing national testing opportunities for students:

Associate Degree Nursing Program – Accreditation Commission For Education in Nursing
Initial Accreditation: March 2019 – Spring 2025

(ACEN Accreditation Documents)

EMT Paramedic – CAAHEP Committee on Accreditation of Educational Programs for the
Emergency Medical Services Professions

Initial Accreditation: July 2016

Continuing Accreditation: March 2022 – 2027

(CoAEMSP Accreditation Documents)

Medical Assistant – Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP)

Initial Accreditation: September 2017

Continuing Accreditation: July 2022 – Fall 2026 (discontinued by college 5/13/2023)

(CAAHEP Accreditation Documents)

Radiologic Technology – Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology

Initial Accreditation: March 2011

Continuing Accreditation: 2016 – 2024

(Radiologic Technology Accreditation Documents)

Ancillary Accreditations

Automotive Technology – National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF*)
Master Automobile Service Technology Accreditation

Initial Accreditation: 1995

Continuing Accreditation: January 2018 - January 2023

*The Council for Higher Education for Accreditation does not recognize this accrediting body.

(Automotive Accreditation Documents)

RLC Foundation Children's Center – Illinois Department of Children and Family Services
Gold

Circle Award

Initial Accreditation: August 2020 – August 2023

(Gold Circle of Quality Certificate)

Licensures and Approvals

In addition to specialized accreditations, other RLC programs hold licensures in several career-technical areas (List of Licensures). All programs which mandate accreditation or require licensure have been reviewed and meet the requirements. Faculty keep abreast of changes and adjust curriculum accordingly. The following programs lead to individual credentialing:

Licensure Pass Rates	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Nurse Assistant	85%	95%	95%	93%	100%	85%	89%
Registered Nurse	80%	81%	80%	64%	75%	77%	86%

Radiologic Tech	75%	94%	100%	90%	90%	73%	82%
Cosmetology	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
EMT-Paramedic	78%	79%	100%	80%	100%	75%	80%
Truck Driving (CDL)	87%	86%	97%	99%	83%	93%	94%
New Miner 5000-23	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
CompTIA Network	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Private Investigator	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Food Sanitation Manager	89%	88%	97%	83%	88%	90%	94%
Ag Chemical Applicator	98%	100%	98%	99%	99%	100%	100%
Electrical Retraining	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
MSHA & OSHA	100%	100%	95%	85%	92%	75%	94%
CPR/ACLS/PALS	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

4A6

There are several processes for evaluating graduate success, both in regards to employment and students who seek advanced degrees.

At the institutional level, a graduate survey is deployed six months after graduation (Student Graduate Surveys, 2019-2021). Also, an exit survey process was re-established after COVID. During the graduation ceremony, student name cards include a survey QR code which can be taken while students are in line for graduation. The survey is focused on employment (Exit Survey Results 2019 and 2023).

Historically, the college uses IPEDS Four-Year Outcomes reports and National Student Clearinghouse data to look at undergraduate institutional completion rates. In May 2023 the college completed the data discovery phase for participation in the Clearinghouse's Postsecondary Data Partnership and expects their data dashboards to provide persistence and completion rates for students post-RLC (See 4C3).

Some specific programs also track students beyond graduation in both employment and continuing education. Several Allied Health programs collect a variety of outcome data to meet accreditation standards. For one, clinical evaluations by site supervisors show the potential student strengths and weaknesses as they leave the program (Clinical Employer Evaluations 2019-2022). For another, various types of surveys are collected six months after students complete their certificate and/or degree to evaluate the program and job placement (Allied Health Employer Surveys). Information gained from the surveys is fed back into program and learning improvements. The Applied Science and Technology Division uses surveys to evaluate employer satisfaction of students during the on-the-job training component of their program of study. Both divisions include a survey of their advisory committee members regarding the success of our graduates (Advisory Survey Results 2023). A few programs also collect board pass rates (Nursing Exam Pass Rates, Cosmetology Graduate Statistics).

Two significant sources of labor market information are used to assure that the programs RLC offers will lead to successful employment. The U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Information Network (www.onetonline.org) provides occupational and industry profiles, as well as salary and economic data, for both the national and state levels. The Illinois Department of Employment Services also provides the same type of labor market data but by county or the local workforce investment area (LWIA). This data is augmented by Lightcast labor market analytics tools (Lightcast Overview), a commercial labor market data source. Labor market information is utilized for CTE in the following ways: new curriculum submitted for approval, five-year program review, and the annual report for advisory meetings (Labor Market Information). Throughout those processes, market and economic need are heavily weighed to ensure graduate success. The ICCB requires that any new program approval request must include labor statistics and area needs assessment and, sometimes, letters of industry support (Class B CDL Application).

When economic indicators lead to any discontinuance of a program, the approval process for inactivating or withdrawing a program is the same as adding a new program. It is reviewed by the Curriculum Committee (Curriculum Committee Minutes) and Academic Council; the Board of Trustees makes the final decision.

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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.

Argument

4B1

The college's commitment to a formal process of student learning assessment is long-standing, dating back to 1997 (Assessment Historical Timeline). Since then, student learning assessment has evolved to become an impetus for positive impact on student success. Notable progress in the last 15 years includes incorporating institutional assessment outcomes into the mission documents to ensure college commitment and developing a systematic cross-curricular peer review process. More recently, assessment data dashboards have been developed for institution-, program-, and course-level analysis. Once housed in the Tk20 Assessment Management System, documentation of assessment is now stored in a Canvas LMS-based management system built in-house.

The benefits of transporting systematic assessment to our Canvas LMS are significant, resulting in improved accessibility and analytic capability. Institutional assessment rubrics are available in Canvas for all faculty, including part-time and dual credit instructors. The rubrics and test questions directly link to institutional and program outcomes within Canvas, allowing assessment staff to tie performance indicators to mastery levels (benchmarks) and generate reports. Canvas also serves as a reliable repository of assessment data, analytics, and reports, housing assessment within the same system as online course management.

NOTE: Both program and institutional outcomes are assessed during our annual assessment cycle. Though connected, these processes are distinctive. For clarity, institutional-level and program-level assessment processes are explained separately in **4B1-2**.

Institution-Level Assessment Process:

In 2007 a campus-wide initiative was undertaken to identify broad institutional learning goals. Four measurable institutional learning outcomes were established for all degree-seeking students: Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, Oral Communication, and Written Communication (Institutional Outcomes Definitions). The acronym "CPOW" was created as a mnemonic for a

campus-wide awareness campaign. CPOW was adopted as part of our mission documents to maintain institutional focus and has become a core expectation for student success. In 2018, the administration began a review of the general education program, resulting in the revision of the General Education Statement to include three measurable institution-level outcomes (General Education Outcomes).

After several faculty and the Vice President of Instruction and Student Affairs attended an HLC Assessment Workshop in 2018, a restructuring of institutional assessment occurred (Comprehensive Assessment Plan 2018). After a review of good practices, as discussed at that event, the college elected to move to two and three-year assessment cycles for each of the four academic institutional outcomes, starting with written communication. This reorganization also included a reset of program assessments to improve good practice by rotating the program outcomes assessed rather than letting faculty select one of their outcomes each year. Finally, the Institutional Assessment Committee, Instructional Designer, and Accreditation and Compliance Specialist reemphasized the message that student learning improvement was a higher priority than meeting benchmarks. This action was taken after a 2017 review of continuous improvement efforts revealed that many programs documented meeting benchmarks, but only 55% of programs were documenting student learning improvement initiatives or improvement results. A goal of 80% of programs documenting improvements in process, initiatives, and student learning was set for Fall 2020. A 2023 review of program assessment indicated 83% of programs reached that goal (Assessment Percentages 2022-2023).

This reorganizing of the assessment process also coincided with a move away from nationally normed assessments, specifically College Base and CAAP critical thinking and writing. A new system using institutional rubrics to assess institutional and general education outcomes was developed. Most of the institutional rubrics are American Association of Colleges and Universities rubrics adopted without revision (AAC&U Adopted Rubrics). The sole exception is the Written Communication Rubric, which originated in-house. Written Communication completed its cycle in 2022. Critical Thinking also completed its cycle in 2022 and Oral Communication began its cycle in Fall 2022. Since preparing our students for a multicultural world is one of the newly adopted general education outcomes, multicultural assessment has been running concurrently since 2020 and is now a required assessment in seven courses identified as multicultural electives (**see 3A**). Some additional multicultural assessments are completed within other courses with multicultural assignments (ENGL 1101 Example). Problem-solving, our institutional math assessment, is set to begin its cycle in Fall 2025. Upon completion of the problem-solving cycle, the assessment sequence will once again be repeated with written communication as the institutional assessment focus.

The processes for using these institutional rubrics are very similar regardless of which institutional outcome is being assessed. In the case of written communication assessment, a pre- and post- testing process was implemented. Degree-seeking student performance was documented as students entered and exited their first required English course, ENGL 1101; then when they exited the research writing course, ENGL 1102 (required for A.A., A.S., A.F.A. and A.E.S. students only); and finally when writing as sophomores with significant credit hours (43.5 or more). Cross-curricular faculty volunteers who taught sophomore courses attended norming sessions and learned to use the Written Communication Rubric for assessment. For critical

thinking and multiculturalism, assessments were administered across programs, with faculty asked to assess one assignment during the inaugural assessment cycle. Data was disaggregated by over or under 43.5 student credit hours.

Each semester assessment results are exported to interactive data dashboards, which were developed in-house and reside on the college's intranet (Institution-Level Data Dashboard Example). They provide analytic results regarding student learning weaknesses. Institutional-level data can be filtered by course or program. Data can also be disaggregated by race and gender. By using these dashboards to look at each established performance indicator, faculty get a quick and clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of student abilities. The analytics also indicate if student performance met benchmarks.

The members of the Institutional Assessment Committee (IAC Members) examine all processes holistically. They focus on examining the results of institutional outcome data in order to discuss concerns and plan for future improvements (IAC Minutes 2019, 2021, 2023). Subcommittees of the IAC are active as required with considerable latitude for identifying and prioritizing improvement initiatives (Critical Thinking Sub-Committee Minutes and Written Communication Sub-Committee Minutes).

Program-Level Assessment Process:

The annual cycle of program and course assessment is also documented in the Canvas Assessment Management System. Like institutional assessment, program and course level assessment takes advantage of Canvas analytics and reporting. In addition to tying performance indicators to rubrics and setting mastery levels as benchmarks, as explained above, Canvas features allow instructors to tie outcome performance indicators to test questions. Over twenty programs and content areas use the dashboard for assessment (Program-Level Assessment Dashboards). Though not required to use the dashboards, each program is required to document annual assessment plans, analysis and results in Canvas. For those programs whose outcomes mirror institutional outcomes, like English and speech, the digital dashboard allows disaggregation of results by program and course level (**see 4B2 below**).

The Canvas LMS includes all program outcomes and links to curriculum maps. Baccalaureate-transfer faculty sometimes articulate course assessment programmatically, as they think of required course sequences as similar to programs. For example, the ENGL 1101 and ENGL 1102 course sequence is sometimes discussed as a "program." Several elective and general education courses are also documented as "programs" in annual assessment reports, particularly when faculty act as one-person departments.

The annual reports on assessment, including data, analysis, initiatives, and results, reside in Canvas (Annual Assessment Report Template, Annual Faculty Task Timeline). All documentation processes are exclusively in the hands of the faculty with support from the Office of Assessment. Faculty examine both the annual institutional assessment data and Canvas analytics assessment results. Peer-review documentation is a system highlight, allowing for critical peer review, exchange of good practice ideas, and mentoring by colleagues more

experienced with assessment (Canvas Peer Feedback Rubric). The current peer-review process is under review (**see 4B3 below**).

A systematic mapping review process began in 2016. Performance levels of "introduce," "reinforce," and "master" are reconfirmed for program- and institutional-level outcomes, including the general education outcomes. Outcome language is also reviewed for measurability. Curriculum maps reside outside the Canvas system on our college intranet site (**see 3B3 below for examples**).

Student achievement of institutional outcomes is shared across college constituents, with faculty examining results in assessment meetings. Dual credit and part-time instructors examine results at a faculty orientation that begins each academic year. The IAC reviews, analyzes, and suggests improvements and changes to the process. Results are updated on the RLC Achieves webpage (www.rlc.edu/achieves).

Co-curricular Assessment Process:

The college began improving its co-curricular assessment process in preparation for the HLC peer review visit in 2018. Using the college's definition of "co-curricular" as a guide (Co-Curricular Definition), a systematic process focused on the three general education learning outcomes was developed. Staff and faculty responsible for co-curricular events use an institutional question bank to construct short Google surveys that assess general education learning outcomes and include any other applicable institutional or program outcome questions. The surveys are augmented with student satisfaction questions. Currently, on-site event materials include a QR code for student access to surveys. A phased implementation began in 2019 and continues to evolve and expand (Co-Curricular Assessment Progress, Co-Curricular Assessment Examples). Those events not yet using the new process still use traditional satisfaction surveys. The assessment process for the third general education outcome, "authenticity," has yet to be developed and is expected to be assessed mostly within the curriculum; however, the recent AI-augmented writing controversy has accelerated the time frame for implementation (Arts and Science Meeting Minutes).

Co-curricular assessment results are reviewed by the event organizer, Director of Instructional Design and Assessment, Instructional Design and Assessment Specialist, and Accreditation and Compliance Specialist. Results and analysis are fed to appropriate faculty and staff through various avenues, including the IAC committee, and presented during Student Success Day.

4B2

Institutional Outcomes Learning Improvements:

As explained above, assessment of institution-level outcomes occurs in two- or three-year cycles using institutional rubrics and test questions linked to performance indicators of ability. Improvement in student critical thinking skills was demonstrated during the most recent assessment cycle, Fall 2020-Fall 2022. There was significant percentage improvement in all critical thinking performance indicators for students entering their sophomore year. Three of five

benchmarks were met by students with fewer than 43.5 credit hours. Four of five benchmarks were met by students with greater than 43.5 credit hours. The Critical Thinking Subcommittee chose to focus on improving students' use of evidence, though students were weaker in articulating "conclusions and related outcomes." The committee decision was supported by instructor-reported classroom evidence that students often fail to differentiate between reliable and unreliable evidence, believe in conspiracies with increasing frequency, and are confused by social media. The committee felt an improvement initiative in use of evidence was a priority. In Spring 2023 the Critical Thinking Subcommittee and English faculty agreed to move critical thinking course content from ENGL 1102 to the beginning of ENGL 1101 (Critical Thinking Sub-Committee Minutes). Because ENGL 1101 is required for all degree-seeking students and ENGL 1102 is required only for A.A., A.S., A.F.A. and A.E.S. students, creating an introductory media literacy and critical thinking module at the beginning of the first-semester English course will benefit more students and introduce essential concepts earlier. This module will be implemented in Fall 2023. Another Critical Thinking Committee initiative was the development of a Critical Thinking Resource Page. This resource was developed as a Canvas resource page, but is also available as a Google Doc, and is used voluntarily across programs. Cross-curricular use of this resource provides a more consistent message regarding media literacy, critical thinking, and reliable resources. The resources found on this page will support the new critical thinking module in ENGL 1101 (Critical Thinking Assessment Executive Report).

Improvements in students' understanding of DEI concepts and multiculturalism were also demonstrated during the inaugural multicultural assessment cycle. "Multiculturalism Knowledge (Worldview)" is the category that most closely relates to the college's general education outcome to "successfully live and work in a multicultural world," and the category of weakest performance by students completing more than 43.5 credit hours; however, four out of six benchmarks were met by students with fewer than 43.5 credit hours and students with at least 43.5 met all six benchmarks with at least an 8% increase in student achievement in all categories. In Spring 2023, DEI committee members created a Multicultural Resource Page for ORIE 1101: First Year Experience, a course required for all degree-seeking students. The resource page serves as a student-focused diversity training module, with video and support material centered on the student experience. Short pre- and post-tests over the concepts of equity and inclusivity were piloted during the same semester. Although participation numbers were low, there was an increase in the number of students who understood the concepts of equity and inclusivity. Expanded use of the module and assessments is expected in Fall 2023 (Multicultural Assessment Executive Report). Additionally, in 2018 an initiative began to provide DEI trainings to faculty, expand multicultural outcomes throughout courses and programs, document DEI activity in classes, and assess the general education multicultural outcome (see **3B3**).

Written communication assessment using institutional rubrics confirmed what previous nationally normed assessments revealed: baccalaureate-transfer students improve their writing from entry to graduation, and their weaknesses are primarily in style and mechanics (Written Communication Executive Report). Both anecdotal and assessment data also indicated an emerging weakness in "development," defined as both meeting assignment length requirements and thoroughly explaining ideas in written work. One improvement initiative for written communication is the development of a cross-curricular resource (RLC Writing Resource Page). The Written Communication subcommittee, exclusively full-time English faculty, gathered a

common set of Written Communication resources into a Canvas resource page for voluntary use across disciplines. These resources provide a more consistent message regarding key writing concepts: plagiarism, research documentation, use of reliable sources, and formal style conventions. Faculty include these resources within their Canvas courses or as Google Docs.

Oral communication is in its second semester of gathering data using the institutional rubric. An Oral Communication subcommittee will meet at the end of Summer 2023 to determine whether the rubric is an effective instrument, whether revisions should be made, and what improvement initiatives should be implemented before the start of the fall semester.

Program- and Course-Level Outcomes Learning Improvement:

All programs typically have four to six learning outcomes. Faculty are required to assess at least one program outcome each year. These assessments are documented in each program's Annual Assessment Report within Canvas (Program Assessment Report Sample). A global assessment report called the Assessment Summary Report is generated by the assessment office. It is a periodic summary of the process and results across all programs. It documents the establishment of benchmarks as well as learning improvements.

Below is recent evidence of course- and program-level learning improvement as a result of the assessment process:

Business Marketing and Visual Communication

With the development of general education outcomes, several faculty added program outcomes reflective of those values. Such is the case with Business and Visual Communication Design. Faculty from these cross-curricular areas saw the need to add diversity-focused instruction and collaborated to create a project focusing on cultural differences. Utilizing the Canvas LMS as a central interaction point, students from these programs collaborated to learn about the differences of select cultures, discussed how those differences would affect advertising, and presented marketing strategies based on their research. Unfortunately, scheduling conflicts have interrupted this cross-curricular experience; however, data continues to be collected within the business marketing course and reveals the success of this multicultural-focused project. Between Fall 2020 and Fall 2022, business faculty assessed student mastery of two performance indicators of multicultural understanding: Knowledge (Self-Awareness) and Knowledge (Worldview). The faculty made several improvements to the assignment, including further research requirements on the cultural norms of the countries under study. As a result, the average success rate for these two outcomes increased from 51% to 87% (Business Marketing Assessment Report).

BUSI 1101

While assessing the accounting skills of students in Introduction to Business (BUSI 1101), the lead business faculty took the opportunity to focus on the institutional outcome of problem-solving. Based on the assessment findings, changes were made to the presentation of course content and the structure of class activities. Faculty devoted half of the class meeting to lectures

and dedicated the remaining class time to group study. Points were awarded for group activities to encourage regular attendance. The extra time spent and work sessions have benefited student learning as is evident in the data collected thus far. Results for the three performance indicators for problem-solving were examined in the semester following the changes. Two revealed an increase of 3% and 12%. Faculty are planning to examine the third indicator for possible improvements (Business 1101 Assessment Report).

MATH 1403

Faculty discovered COVID mitigations played a role in altering their assessment efforts; however, a lead math instructor noted that pre-recorded lectures and online practice tests aided in the improvement of student learning. As instruction returned to face-to-face delivery, these practices have remained in place. In addition, item analysis of post-test questions revealed that students consistently performed the worst in determining standard deviation. Based on this discovery, additional instruction and a focused quiz covering the areas of weakness were added. The following year, faculty reported that these improvements doubled the student success rate in determining standard deviation, from 21% to 42% (Math 1403 Assessment Report).

MATH 1108

Observation and assessment within the math department have consistently revealed that students perform worse on mathematical word problems. Lead faculty implemented Canvas grading rubrics, and they aligned outcomes to collect assessment data and closely analyzed results within fixed and variable, triangle, and perimeter calculations. The pilot year helped faculty hone the process and expand participation to adjunct faculty. Based on assessment results from that year, faculty increased emphasis on word problems in lectures and assignments. As a result, the average percentage of students meeting benchmarks in these outcomes increased by 18% from year one to year two (Math 1108 Assessment Report).

CNA 1201

Certified Nursing Assistant faculty found data collection difficult because of the high number of adjuncts. To improve data collection and analysis, and lessen the burden on participating faculty, they selected common quiz questions that are administered in every CNA course. The questions were linked to program outcomes using Canvas alignment features. This resulted in data analysis across the program, regardless of faculty status. Based on disappointing year one results, faculty provided additional content related to dementia and information regarding elderly people from other cultures. Faculty also emphasized areas of weakness, including identification of early signs of Alzheimer's, and tasks to redirect clients. These changes resulted in significant improvement in student learning, increasing levels of performance by nearly 20% (CNA Assessment Report).

Radiologic Technology Program

Previous Radiologic Technology graduates recommended a subscription-based company to review for their national board examinations. After attending a company demo, it was evident to faculty that the materials provided could not only help students prepare for their registry exam,

but also help fill in some learning gaps in radiology courses. The new tool has been implemented and, although data is limited, faculty are already seeing improvements in student learning (Radiology Assessment Report).

Many other courses and programs show improvement in methodology, process, and data analysis. Music and philosophy are representative examples: After reviewing assessment processes within the music department and considering Canvas LMS analytic capabilities, the lead faculty embraced Canvas features, implementing an assessment collection process aligning student learning outcomes with select final exam questions. Data dashboards allowed faculty to drill down to review by delivery modality, gender, or ethnicity. As a result, music faculty have been able to improve the assessment process and expand it to include dual credit and adjunct faculty; they continue to experience a high percentage of student success in all assessment areas (Music Assessment Report). After realizing that their data did not properly connect to the data dashboards for analysis, the philosophy faculty decided to switch gears and analyze another course issue: student success in varying delivery modalities. The delivery modality for the Spring 2022 course offering was changed to HyFlex from face-to-face. Faculty analyzed student learning by comparing the two modalities. Data revealed that student attendance and participation were concerning in the HyFlex model. Based on that data, faculty returned to the traditional classroom paired with asynchronous opportunities. While data from the current assessment year is pending, faculty have noted marked improvements in student engagement (Philosophy Assessment Report).

Some programs are part-time faculty-led programs. In several of these programs, assessment stalled. Programs impacted include some low enrollment allied health programs, American government, anthropology, and early childhood education. Simple content area pre- and post-testing instruments were designed as a systematic solution. Individual training was provided for several instructors, including those teaching cultural anthropology and early childhood education (ECE). Currently, cultural anthropology is being assessed with EMT and ECE assessment planned for Summer 2023 (Part-time Led Anthropology Assessment).

4B3

To evaluate the quality of assessment activity, RLC periodically reviews good practice guidelines from national organizations, including those from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) and, more recently, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The following aspects of the college's assessment process demonstrate good practice as defined by national organizations:

- All aspects of administering and analyzing assessments are performed by faculty. A majority of the Institutional Assessment Committee Members (IAC), when including sub-committees, are faculty. The IAC is co-chaired by the Director of Instructional Design and Assessment and one faculty member. In-house assessment data entry is exclusively performed by faculty, including dual credit and part-time instructors in some programs. Results are analyzed by full-time faculty leads with support from the Office of Instructional Design and Assessment.

- Assessment is codified with policy and procedures language (Assessment Policy). That policy is supported monetarily with annual salaries for assessment office personnel, including salaries of assessment mentors and faculty development monies for assessment-focused conferences (Annual Assessment Expenditure). Monies are budgeted for supporting all student learning activities, including a \$200 annual stipend for faculty serving as mentors. There is also a \$500 Assessment Award for deserving faculty picked through an annual nomination process (Assessment Award Letter). Assessment award winners are recognized in the Catalog's faculty directory and the RLC Fact Book.
- In addition to regular in-service training, the college holds two annual "Student Success Days" for full-time faculty (Student Success Day Documents). They focus on assessment as well as retention efforts. Traditionally, they have included workshops, guest speakers, data review sessions, and peer mentoring. During the annual Faculty Orientation Day, part-time and dual credit instructors are informed about assessment.
- Mapping the proper level of student performance is now systematic, occurring approximately every three years. The process has resulted in outcome revisions for improved measurability and confirmation that the appropriate level of student work is occurring in both courses and programs. A mapping review was completed in Spring 2017 and Summer 2018. A 2022 mapping session focused on reviewing the first two general education outcomes, "Connections" and "Multiculturalism" (Sample Curriculum Maps 2022, Mapping Discoveries 2022). A review focused on the "Authenticity" general education outcome is scheduled for Fall 2023.
- The college developed systematic documentation of assessment through TK20 and continues systematic assessment using an in-house management system within Canvas. The college's Director of Instructional Design and Assessment oversees the management systems and supports faculty with training.
- Historically, cross-curricular mentoring is a significant part of our annual assessment activity. Currently, over 20 of 48 full-time faculty volunteer as mentors for cross-curricular reviews of assessment (Mentor Assignments 2020); however, some disruption of the process occurred during COVID. The assessment director and specialist used this time to examine how peer-review mentoring can continue with more consistent and meaningful feedback. Revisions to the process are under review (Peer Review Process Revisions).
- Assessment is integrated into college processes. Though there is room for improvement, assessment analysis is connected to institutional budgeting through long- and short-term strategic planning and program review. ICCB program reviews now require an ever-increasing amount of assessment and retention/completion data (see 4A1).

Though the college demonstrates a commitment to assessment and has evidence of student learning improvement through its processes, a review of good practice reveals several current concerns:

- The shift from TK20 to the Canvas LMS in 2019, development of the digital dashboard system in 2020, and disruption from COVID culminated in faculty being frustrated and confused by assessment. Improvement in engagement is expected as assessment processes stabilize post-COVID. Faculty were asked to identify assessment concerns, strengths, and needs during the January 2023 Student Success Day. Their responses will help drive improvement in the process moving forward (Assessment Focus Group Minutes).
- Despite efforts to make assessment processes simpler and more manageable, doing too much is still an issue. The IAC will continue to look for ways to minimize work while improving student learning.
- Though sub-committees are active, the IAC needs to be more a working group than an advisory group. A meeting was held in Spring 2023 to discuss how to accomplish this (Spring 23 IAC Minutes).
- An update of the college's common assessment vocabulary is overdue. It will be completed in 2024.

To regain momentum lost during COVID and keep the focus on continuous student learning improvement, RLC has hired HLC academy scholar Rosemary Niedens as an outside consultant to review assessment processes. A Fall 2023 review of assessment practices will lead to an exit report at Student Success Day in January 2024.

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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.)

Argument

4C1

Our full-time graduation rates are rather high in comparison to other Illinois community colleges. The most recent (2018) IPEDS data shows 59% of full-time students graduated at 150% completion time. According to *Community College Review*, this ranks RLC eleventh out of fifty-nine Illinois community and private, not-for-profit, colleges (CC Review Ranking). This metric, among others, is why RLC has been nominated for the Aspen Award seven times since 2011. Our full-time student completion goal is to maintain this level of achievement.

Graduation Rates from IPEDS			
Full-Time, First-Time Degree/Certificate Seeking			
Cohort Year	100% Graduation Rates	150% Graduation Rates	200% Graduation Rates
Fall 2018	45%	59%	61%
Fall 2017	41%	56%	58%
Fall 2016	37%	53%	54%
Fall 2015	46%	61%	63%
Fall 2014	41%	58%	60%

The college's focus is on part-time and non-white students' retention and completion. A comparison to regional college cohorts reveals an 11% better retention rate of part-time students, but the RLC retention gap between full- and part-time students has averaged a 19.2% disparity over the last six student cohort years. Over that same time span our part-time population averaged 61.72% of our total student population. Despite an ongoing focus on improving part-time retention, such as inclusion of part-time students into ORIE 1101 in 2018, part-time retention rates have lagged by at least 20% for the last three cohort years.

Retention Rates from IPEDS Fall Enrollment Reports		
Cohort Year	Full-Time, First-Time	Part-Time, First-Time
Fall 2020	66%	45%
Fall 2019	63%	38%
Fall 2018	69%	48%
Fall 2017	65%	50%
Fall 2016	59%	46%
Fall 2015	70%	50%

The graduation rate for black students verses white students shows a similar disparity. The 150% normal time completion rate for full-time white students for the Fall 2016 cohort was 55%, while the black student 150% normal time completion rate was 25%. In 2018 the disparity between graduation of black and white students decreased slightly with a 62% graduation rate for full-time white students and 42% for full-time black students.

Given these disparities, the college has adopted two retention and completion goals for the 2023-2025 strategic planning period: 1) Lower the success percentage disparity between part-time and full-time retention to 10-15 % from 15-20% and 2) improve graduation rates by 5% focusing on part-time students and underrepresented minorities (URM).

Before establishing these institutional goals, the college was addressing these disparities in various activities and initiatives: a revised Strategic and Enrollment Management Plan includes goals related to part-time and URM students; RLC increased outreach to the in-district district black community; RLC expanded engagement and community building activities with our out-of-district athletes (Taco Bar Kickoff), a group with a high percentage of URM students; and a revised DEI strategic planning post-COVID. All these activities are now focused under the 2023 revised strategic goal of "Maximizing Student Success." As of Spring 2023 the college is considering a review of its service to part-time students as its next quality initiative, including a review of all operations for improved service to this group.

Retention and completion goals are presented to college staff and faculty at various in-service events, though COVID disruptions have impacted the systematic sharing of this information (2018 Faculty Orientation and Student Learning Day). Graduation/retention goals were shared at the February 2023 In-Service and will be presented at Faculty Orientation and Student Success Day in 2023.

4C2

The Institutional Compliance and Research (ICR) Department collects campus-wide data, relying on the college ERP, IPEDS and the Illinois Community College Board in collecting, organizing and comparing retention and completion information. The Director of Institutional Compliance and Research oversees IR and is part of President's Cabinet. Section V of the annually updated RLC Fact Book, prepared by the ICR Department, includes retention and completion data for all college employees to reference and is reviewed by Cabinet (minutes). Retention and completion information is discussed at PELT (PELT Minutes).

"Maximizing Student Success" is identified as one of six focus areas of strategic planning and "Utilize a Systemic Approach to...College Readiness and Retention..." is a strategic priority. The college's strategic retention initiatives are documented and tracked using an annually updated spreadsheet (Strategic Plan Spreadsheet: Retention Priority). Retention initiatives are reviewed and discussed during the strategic planning process in Cabinet, and prioritized based on institutional need and potential impact.

The Institutional Outreach Department maintains and revises a retention-focused Enrollment Management Plan. Many of the goals are established as a response to student engagement concerns noted in the 2014, 2017, and 2022 CCSSE Reports.

In addition to institutional decision-making, R&C data is used within the various instructional and student services areas. These groups often collect additional R&C data for the students they serve:

Grant programs centered on career-technical fields rely heavily on their own R&C data in their reporting, analyzing, and decision-making (Grant Overview). The college maintains a number of grants related to improving student success. All programs outlined below collect, analyze and create action plans in response to completion and retention numbers. Many performance measure results are provided by ICCB through the Perkins Online Data System.

STARS (Student Transfer And Retention Support) and Upward Bound are RLC's two Department of Education TRIO Grants. Both programs have federal retention goals and report success (Grant Objectives Reports).

The Illinois Community College Board's program review process requires collection and analysis of persistence and retention data for each program and is particularly important in the Applied

Science and Allied Health program accreditations and board exams Criminal Justice Program Review 2016-2020, Radiologic Technology Program Review).

College Prep English and math also collect success rates (completion rates). The college's developmental English program, revised as a corequisite program in 2016, compares success in the English corequisite (1411) and college transfer (1101) courses (Fall 2017-Fall 2022 Success). Math also tracks corequisite student success in its corequisite, Math 1410, and its transfer course, Math 1107 (Fall 2020-Fall 2022 Success).

Completion and retention of full- and part-time degree-seeking students have been tracked in ORIE 1101, First Year Experience, since 2018. Unfortunately, numbers don't reveal a significant improvement in part-time R&C and recent numbers show variances that may be COVID-related (FYE Retention Report 2022-2022).

4C3

Math Lab:

Lower completion rates for online courses led to the creation of a math hybrid class requiring in-person testing. Students progress at their own rate, with required tutor supervision when taking tests or quizzes (Math Lab Information for Advisors).

Health Careers Grant:

Rend Lake College was one of the 39 schools chosen, and the only school chosen in Illinois, to receive a Title III Pathways to Success in Health Careers Grant. RLC received approximately \$449,000 annually, for a total of \$2,249,833 over five years. The data from the Nursing program during Title III was compared to pre-Title III data and there was an 18-23 percent increase in successful completion since the inception of Title III. During this initiative, other significant division changes occurred, chiefly the conversion of a system-based to a concept-based curriculum. It is therefore difficult to identify a single cause for the increase. However, when examining the Title III data there is an increase in successful completion of NURS 1209 in years two and three. During year one 78% of students successfully complete NURS 1209. For the next two years, hours in the HSSSC were mandatory. In those two years, NURS 1209 was successfully completed by 95% in year two and 94% in year three. This data led to the decision to begin developing targeted tutoring and study groups for program courses across campus that present the greatest obstacle to successful completion (Nursing Grade Distribution).

Perkins:

Through our Perkins Coordinator all Career-Technical courses retention and completion data is analyzed annually, including gender and race disaggregated data. For over five years RLC has met Perkins placement, retention and completion goals; however, the college maintains and develops new retention and completion initiatives based on Perkins data (Perkins Reports 2023).

Nursing:

Following low completion rates in the college's nursing program in 2021, the director of the nursing program developed and implemented a improvement plan designed to increase completion rates. Overall, completion rates increased from 49% to 56.5% (2022 Improvement Plan).

Grants:

Most grants focused on student success require documenting, analyzing, and meeting target completion goals. Three new grants focus on recruitment, retention and completion. The ICCB Early Childhood Education and PATH grants provide success coaches and student support services to reduce barriers to completion and expand recruiting and retention initiatives (overview). A Title III grant proposal, *Thriving through Change*, was submitted in May 2023. The grant centers around the development of new academic programs in sustainable manufacturing and agriculture with goals to increase enrollment, retention, and completion in these programs.

4C4

The college uses IPEDS data reporting as a foundation for organizing and interpreting its PRC data. ICCB and HLC reporting expectations have traditionally guided the nature of PRC data collection, but the college's continual shift to an evidence-based culture has expanded its collection of information. This expansion includes building assessment dashboards in-house that include calculations of student completion rates including disaggregation by race and gender (see **4B2**). RLC joined the National Student Clearinghouse's Postsecondary Data Partnership in Spring 2023. As of May 3, 2023, all data for the PDP Dashboards has been submitted, verified, and certified by NSC. The college is changing its ERP to Ellucian Colleague in 2024, which provides improved retention and completion analytics compared to our previous system. The ICR Department compiles significant college data resulting in an annual RLC Fact Book.

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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.

Summary

The college has effective processes in place for ensuring the quality of its programs; however, it continues to seek better student graduate information, particularly employment data.

Documented assessment activities show a significant commitment to student learning assessment, and improvements are being made at all levels. Several assessment concerns are currently being addressed which include revising its peer-review process. The college continues to search for methods to get better results with greater efficiency. Until recently co-curricular assessment was not systematic, but a systematic assessment process is now in place, co-curricular activities are mapped to outcomes, and our direct assessment process is expanding.

The annual RLC Fact Book now includes more PRC data and resides on the college's website. PRC data is shared with college constituents annually at faculty orientations, in-services, and student learning days. It is a significant part of our program review, Perkins, and grant processes. RLC joined the National Student Clearinghouse's Postsecondary Data Partnership in Spring 2023 to improve the quality and quantity of retention and completion data. The college needs to enhance its documentation of improvements based on retention and completion analysis.

Sources

There are no sources.

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.

Argument

5A1

Various internal constituencies are engaged in RLC's governance. The Board meets at 6:30 p.m. the second Tuesday of the month. There are exceptions, such as the months in which the budget must sit for 30 days. The Board approves an annual schedule of meetings, which is posted to the college's website. Prior to each meeting, the members of the Board are emailed their packet (example), which contains the agenda; recommendations, rationales and any supporting materials for action items; minutes of the previous meeting; and a list of coming events. The Board approves payment of bills and reviews financial information monthly, and approves the budget and tax levy annually. New or revised policies are brought to the Board for two readings (policies). The monthly Board agenda (example) includes opportunities the Academic Council and the RLC Foundation to update the Board about happenings in their respective areas, as well as for the Board's Illinois Community College Trustees Association representative to give a report. There is time allotted for the college President to give remarks, and for the Board to hear an accreditation update from appropriate staff and faculty.

Section One of the RLC Policy Manual is devoted entirely to policy and procedure concerning the Board of Trustees.

Internal constituencies are engaged in additional ways for purposes of governance. As noted in 2C, the President's Executive Leadership Team and the President's Cabinet (rosters and policies)

each meet regularly to discuss college operations, provide updates, and facilitate interdepartmental communication. In recent years, the President's Cabinet has been flattened, meaning that during the meetings, there is an equality among voices regardless of the level of a person's position. This allows for free contributions from all members. In the course of 2022, several new members were added to Cabinet in order to bring new perspectives and information to the table.

Employees are involved in institutional operations and governance via several standing committees which meet regularly. Among these are the Instructional Deans and Directors, Academic Council and its subcommittees, and various division and departmental meetings. Employees participate in the strategic planning process as well, described in detail in **5C**.

Students are engaged in shared governance through the presence of a student trustee (state law) on the Board of Trustees, who has an advisory vote on action items (policy). The Community College Survey of Student Engagement also is administered, with results discussed at Cabinet (minutes). Students are surveyed at various points throughout their time at RLC and beyond, with results discussed at Cabinet or PELT as appropriate. In February 2023, a student panel was assembled during a Board of Trustees meeting (minutes) to discuss their experiences, impressions of their time as students, what we did well and could improve upon, and to give both the students and the board an opportunity to ask questions.

5A2

Overall, RLC is becoming more data-driven in its decision-making processes, and will continue to improve in this respect. Steps the college has taken include a commitment to complete the CCSSE more regularly (though this was hampered by the COVID shutdown, we resumed in 2022), creation of the RLC Achieves page to promote transparency in college data and other material, and the move toward SharePoint as a central hub for institutional documents. The college's intranet site, containing helpful information for employees, has been moved to SharePoint. Several forms, such as the class cancellation form, RL-Cares form, activity request form, and others, have been moved online and integrated with SharePoint, which allows collection and export of bulk data. The revamp of the strategic planning process has made it more data-driven and helps close the loop from year to year.

The college develops and documents evidence of its performance in several ways. The Illinois Community College Board recognition process, occurring every five years, involves a thorough review of RLC's academic programs, student services, finances, facilities and accountability (recognition manual). In addition to responding to the ICCB's criteria, these reviews also include the college's own recommendations for improvement and indicators for compliance. When ICCB reviews the college's recognition application, they send back a report containing advisory and compliance recommendations for improving college processes in appropriate areas. An example of a change made as a result of the process includes adapting our institutional policy to mirror ICCB interpretations regarding faculty qualifications (p. 8).

The institution learns from experience and feedback. Survey results from RLC's in-service days indicated that many of the faculty and staff prefer information and training which is more relevant to their particular positions. In recent years, the in-service agenda has included more breakout sessions, led by current staff and faculty members, on a more diverse set of subjects. The Strategic Enrollment Management Plan is another example of operational learning. Closely related, the Marketing Strategy described in **1B3** is an example of data-driven decision-making (appendix). The Marketing and Communications Department also has used media preference surveys to steer many of its marketing efforts.

Productivity analyses on the various educational programs offered by the college are prepared by the Business Office in conjunction with the instructional deans. These provide longitudinal data at the program level such as revenue generated from tuition, fees and state reimbursement; expenses for salaries, benefits, and other factors; and an overall profit or loss. This provides insight into which programs remain in demand and which do not, as well as whether a particular program justifies full-time faculty or adjunct instructors. These are reviewed by President's Cabinet. The ICCB-mandated program review process also results in data that is reviewed and acted upon. While program reviews had been reviewed at the Cabinet level in years past, in 2023 the format changed to a more open-ended and inclusive one in which anyone interested could attend the program review presentations.

Working with Information Technology, the Institutional Compliance and Research Department has been able to provide numerous helpful reports pulled from PowerCampus as well as information the college can use for decision-making purposes; much of this is evident in the Fact Book. ICR provides enrollment reports to Cabinet frequently during the first several weeks of a semester, and the department also looks at students who drop classes and their stated reasons. Due to turnover and structural reorganization, there currently is not a full-time IR staff member; most reporting duties are executed by the Project Manager for IT and IR. We recognize the need for full-time staff in IR and will address that in the coming fiscal year.

Experience at times teaches the college when to let go. As discussed in **2A2**, the repurposing of the Aquatics Center into the Event Center was based on profitability analysis and usage numbers.

The HLC accreditation process is a large data collection and evaluation effort in itself, and there are programmatic accreditations requiring periodic evaluations as well.

RLC has used the Community College Survey of Student Engagement to document how we perform in terms of CCSSE's five benchmarks of effective educational practice: Active and Collaborative Learning; Student Effort; Academic Challenge; Student-Faculty Interaction; and Support for Learners. The CCSSE results are reviewed at Cabinet and in 2022 were discussed during one of RLC's monthly Wednesday Roundtables.

RLC presents evidence of performance and accomplishments to the public as well. The annual Report to Our Community is distributed by mail to friends of the college and is attached to the college website. This publication includes highlights from the previous year, major changes, a snapshot of institutional finances, fast facts about enrollment, and more. The RLC Achieves web page (www.rlc.edu/achieves) contains information about success rates, achievements on the part

of students and employees, major developments and other topics. The Marketing and Communications Department generates numerous press releases, housed at www.rlc.edu/news, on subjects ranging from graduation and honor rolls to coming events and upcoming trainings. Highlights of each Board meeting are sent to area media and to all faculty and staff.

An important collection of data occurs with the compilation and dissemination of the RLC Fact Book. This document, produced primarily by the Institutional Compliance and Research Department with help from other areas, provides longitudinal enrollment information, along with facts and figures on such topics as financial aid; human resources; tuition and fees; persistence, retention and completion, and more. The Fact Book is publicly available on the RLC Achieves page.

Academic assessment information is documented using Canvas. Assessment of student learning and support services is addressed more thoroughly in **Criterion 4**, as is work to improve persistence, retention and completion.

5A3

Faculty members are involved in setting academic requirements. They create the course syllabus for each class, and textbooks are selected by the full-time faculty in each area. The Academic Council meets to discuss academic issues (sample minutes). Faculty and staff also are involved in several collaborative groups, such as the Institutional Assessment Committee, the Academic Calendar Committee, the Marketing Advisory Team, and others. Various departments are involved in the annual catalog review process, which also includes a website review (timeline).

Student engagement in institutional governance is accomplished through the election of a student member of the Board of Trustees (Illinois law, RLC Policy). Student involvement also comes from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and instruments such as student satisfaction surveys and graduation surveys distributed from the college's Class Climate account. These are discussed at PELT (May 2022, January 2023 minutes). More surveys are available for review in the Institutional Compliance and Research Department.

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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.

Argument

5B1

Operational Staff

RLC's staff are appropriately qualified and trained. Qualifications for staff positions are set by members of Cabinet and are included in job announcements, which are distributed by the Human Resources Department in cooperation with the initiating department (Policy 3.1010). Prospective employees who are offered positions must successfully pass a background screening.

All new employees are given an Employee Handbook and an orientation checklist, which requires that they visit several offices on campus for introductions and other matters. They also are given access to the RLC Policy Manual. Non-faculty employees undergo formal evaluations every even-numbered year, although supervisors may conduct an evaluation at any given time (Policy 3.1200). Staff submit to HR a form regarding professional development each spring. These documents are available in the Human Resources Office. Staff qualifications also are documented by the employee recommendation form filled out during the hiring process. General degrees and certifications of staff are included in individual listings in the online staff directory and the staff listing in the college Catalog.

Faculty and support staff qualifications are addressed in **3C**.

In Fall 2022, RLC employed 308 total employees, of which 170 were full-time and 138 were part-time. This included 47 full-time faculty and 54 adjunct instructors. Educational programs are delivered in traditional classroom settings through the week as well as through online and hybrid instruction (class schedule). Our hyflex and blended flex options were a direct result of the shift to remote learning due to COVID-19 in Spring 2020. Administrative offices are open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday through fall and spring semesters and from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday during the summer term

(workweek policy). Much more can be done remotely now, from advisement appointments and financial aid consultations to RL-Cares referrals and student record requests.

Both the RLC MarketPlace in Mt. Vernon and the Murphy-Wall Pinckneyville Campus have access to college IT and maintenance staff when needed.

Infrastructure

Information Technology infrastructure and associated services are maintained by a staff of 11 full-time and two part-time employees. The coordinator of network operations and security supervises the department and reports to the Associate Vice President of Institutional Outreach (organizational chart). The department also includes programmers, coordinator of computing and audiovisual services, coordinator of technology integration and training, network specialist, information systems specialist, computer technicians, project manager, and the help desk and support specialist. For students in online or hybrid classes, the IT Help Desk is available, and students can email the help desk or their instructors during weekends and off hours. Additionally, the Canvas LMS includes 24/7/365 tech support for students and employees.

Much of IT's progress and development stems from the strategic planning process, discussed in **5C**. An IT forecast has been created to help guide the college's efforts in this regard. The college continues to provide sufficient funding for IT projects and development (IT budget). In addition to institutional funds, the college in Spring 2023 issued bonds in part to help fund an ERP upgrade to Colleague. Stimulus funds were used to upgrade switches, purchase distance learning equipment, and improve campus Wi-Fi. A recent grant funded an increase in the campus' bandwidth as well.

The Physical Plant includes maintenance, grounds, custodial, and shipping and receiving staff. The department includes individuals strong in areas such as electrical, plumbing, carpentry and more, allowing our staff to complete many projects in-house (projects list).

5B2

The goals included in the college's mission statement refer generally to the goals of the individual student and our commitment to helping them reach those goals. This is a realistic aspiration due to multiple factors, including qualified faculty and the various student support services available. Specific to degree-seeking students are the four institutional outcomes – critical thinking, problem solving, oral communication and written communication (CPOW) – and the General Education Statement included in the college Catalog. The institutional outcomes have for several years been incorporated into degree curricula and are assessed. The mission also references community-focused programming, which is realistic and overseen by the Community and Corporate Education Department.

The college's strategic planning process (**5C**), which determines how resources are allocated, ultimately derives from its mission, as seen in these worksheets. The six major strategic focuses

were generated through a day-long appreciative inquiry session during the February 2020 in-service. These categories subsequently were used to classify planning requests.

5B3

The budgeting process begins in late spring with strategic planning. The Business Office looks at what was spent in each department's line items the prior fiscal year, consults with fiscal managers to determine expected deviations in those amounts, and factors in the new expenses resulting from the strategic planning process. Revenue projections are made based on expected disbursements from the state, local property taxes, and tuition and fees based on enrollment projections, as well as any expected grant funds.

The budget is reviewed by President's Cabinet and later approved in tentative form by the Board of Trustees. By state law, the budget then must sit open for public examination for 30 days, with a public hearing and final adoption at the next Board meeting. The Business Office provides a quarterly trial balance report to Cabinet members and conducts a mid-year budget review in which fiscal managers review the status of their budgets and request any necessary adjustments.

Expenses are monitored through the requisition approval process (Policy 5.1200). When purchases are required, fiscal managers or their designees enter requisitions into the college's online portal through Microsoft GP. These are approved by the fiscal manager, controller and CFO before being sent to accounts payable. Hard copies of purchase orders are forwarded to the fiscal managers. When received by the college, invoices are stamped with locations to fill in the fiscal manager's name or initials, purchase order number, and budget account number. The purchase orders are stapled to the invoice and returned to the Business Office, where they are processed for payment and filed.

Fiscal managers can request budget reports from the Business Office as needed and respond if adjustments are required. As discussed in **2A**, financial information is reviewed by the Board, and grants go through an approval and reporting process. The college also undergoes an annual audit.

5B4

Rend Lake College remains in solid financial position and has the resources needed to support its operations, despite the State of Illinois' budget difficulties in recent years (CFO Financials Presentation). The FY 2023 budget projected \$19,827,938 in expenditures from the operating funds (education fund and operations and maintenance fund), with 84.5 percent of that, or \$16,773,219, coming from the education fund (p. 5). The FY 2022 audit includes a breakdown of our fund expenditures by activity, such as Instruction (\$8.2 million), Academic Support (\$1.6 million), Student Services (\$2.5 million), and Scholarships / Grants / Waivers (\$9.9 million) out of the overall expenditures of \$38.7 million.

Additionally, the college aggressively seeks out grant opportunities to further its educational purpose. In FY 2022, more than \$9.6 million in grants were allocated for such things as a manufacturing academy (nearly \$5 million), apprenticeship programming (almost \$110,000) and early childhood programming (\$594,000). In FY 2023, the nearly \$5 million in grants included \$416,000 for allied health support, \$281,000 for beginner farmers and ranchers, and \$220,000 for student retention and completion.

The strategic planning process, discussed in greater detail in **5C**, includes focuses derived from the mission and devoted to educational purposes, including excellence in teaching and learning and maximizing student success (strategic focus).

The college has a solid financial footing to continue to fund its educational purpose as well. Included as calculations in our annual Institutional Updates, RLC's recent Composite Financial Indicator (CFI) values are 7.57 (2022), 7.41 (2021), 5.74 (2020), 5.05 (2019 & 2018), 4.17 (FY 2017), 2.11 (FY 2016), and 4.01 (FY 2015). This number is a measure of an accredited institution's fiscal viability. CFIs in this range are considered "above the zone," meaning there is no need for review by HLC's Financial Panel.

Fund balances have increased over the last decade, rising from \$19,526,482 in FY 2013 to \$33,657,120 in FY 2022. This has been the result of prudent planning, organizational restructuring and bonding. A major revenue-generating initiative in 2016 involved the sale and immediate repurchase of the RLC MarketPlace, the college's Mt. Vernon location. The facility was sold for \$5 million and immediately repurchased through a bond issuance (July 2016 board minutes). This generated \$5 million in unrestricted cash reserves for the district, and was completed ahead of a potential property tax freeze under consideration in Illinois. An additional \$5 million bond issue was completed in 2017 over a series of board meetings as another boost to the college's reserves, with the caveat that this money will not be used without the permission of the Board of Trustees (June 2017 special board minutes); another \$5.5 million bond issue occurred in 2020 (minutes). With the upcoming retirement of some existing bonds, in Spring 2023 the college began the process of a new bond issuance of up to \$15 million to help fund initiatives such as the ERP upgrade, the new Allied Health Building in development, boiler and chiller replacements, computer upgrades, and more (packet).

President's Cabinet in February 2018 (minutes) explored the amount of tuition the institution had been waiving. Some waivers, including High Achievers Awards and athletic waivers, were reduced in FY 2019 in an effort to bring up the percentage of actual revenue realized from tuition. Cabinet members believe it is important to reduce the amount of tuition given away before exploring tuition or fee increases.

The college has undertaken additional money-saving measures in recent years, including the conversion of the employee insurance plan from a traditional insurance system to a health savings account (HSA) system, which has saved the college about \$600,000 since the conversion in 2015.

Retirements and resignations have been carefully examined to determine if those positions need replaced or if they can be filled with part-time employees. For example, the Director of

Institutional Compliance and Research now also serves as Director of Financial Aid after the resignation of the previous director. Upon the resignation of the CEO of the RLC Foundation, that unit was moved under the Executive Director of Administrative Services for oversight. The Community Outreach Specialist was not replaced and some of those duties were folded into an existing marketing department position. The Dean of Community and Corporate Education also was not replaced after her resignation in 2022 and those duties were distributed to other departments.

Prior to FY 2016, RLC had not experienced a deficit in the past 10 years. This was due to the college's ability over the years to build strong reserves thanks to careful fiscal management. However, the lack of state funding caused the college to experience a deficit of nearly \$3,000,000 in FY 2016. In FY 2017 the college was able to offset the prior year's deficit with a surplus of nearly \$2,000,000 (Uniform Financial Statement 1). As stated above, the college has been able to put money back into its fund balance since that time, from a low of \$17,402,861 in FY 2016 to \$33,657,120 in FY 2022. For FY 2023, a surplus and increase to fund balance is again projected.

The percentage state funding has fluctuated over the years. This is a highly solvent position for the college considering the lack of funding from the state in recent years. The state went more than two years – July 1, 2015-July 6, 2017 – without a budget due to legislative gridlock. The impasse resulted in RLC missing about \$5.5 million in equalization payments, operating grants and other revenue (Uniform Financial Statements). RLC has not sought lines of credit or issued tax anticipation warrants, and has not experienced mass layoffs.

The state budget impasse prompted two reports per HLC's request, in which many of these actions were reported. Illinois public institutions of higher education were required to submit reports in February 2016 and in December 2016, based largely on CC5A, addressing our status in light of the budget impasse and any plans for layoffs or personnel cuts. Our perspective in both cases was that we were in sound financial position considering the circumstances and that we had been able to avoid layoffs.

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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.

Argument

5C1

Policy 2.1150 explains RLC's strategic planning process, which in 2016 was restructured to flow more directly from the college's mission and become more strategic in nature. This strategic planning process is intrinsically tied to the budget process described in **5B**. The mission statement and the strategic focuses are reviewed at the departmental level in this process as well.

The strategic planning process, District Site and Construction Master Plan and Resource Allocation Management Plan (RAMP) are designed to ensure the college remains focused on the strategic allocation of resources. The Master Plan (December 2022 board minutes; Policy 5.1015) and RAMP (June 2022 minutes) are approved by the Board. The Master Plan process is described in the document, with the public input solicitation process last occurring in 2022.

In Spring 2020, the college worked with Inspired Engagement, a consulting firm with whom RLC works for executive coaching, leadership training, and other functions, to conduct an appreciative inquiry meant to rethink and revise the college's strategic focuses. The day-long effort was conducted as part of the spring in-service and involved employees from all departments of campus. It resulted in the six strategic focuses which provide the current foundation of the planning process.

The annual strategic planning process typically begins with spring in-service, with time allotted in the afternoons for campus departments to meet, review the current planning items pertaining to their areas, and discuss new items and initiatives to add to the strategic plan for the next three fiscal years. Departments have the option to fill out SOAR analyses to help facilitate the process.

In Spring 2023, the planning document was changed from a large Microsoft Excel document to SharePoint-based form that is easier to use and sort (new format). While anyone can submit an item, the respective Cabinet member can review, and approve or disapprove submissions. They also designate whether an item is institutional or departmental. Institutional items typically are those items that cost more than \$1,000 or are of such a nature to require Cabinet-level discussion; departmental items are those which can be funded from existing departmental budgets and are less complex.

Planning requests include information such as originating department, estimated cost, funding source, and justifications. In order to provide data on the origin of a request, "Source" and "Rationale" columns were added in Spring 2018. These pieces are intended to provide data on the origin of a given request, such as an Advisory Committee, assessment activities, program review, or SOAR analysis. Cabinet then reviews this list, merges any duplications, and approves or rejects the items.

President's Cabinet meets to review all institutional items and select which are to be funded and pursued, which can be pushed back to the next fiscal year, which can be placed on departmental priority lists, and which can be terminated. This typically takes multiple meetings, and the President's Executive Leadership Team will review and make any final determinations if needed.

The CFO both consults on fiscal viability of planned actions throughout the process and approves the final plan. Through these processes, an overall strategic plan and a tentative budget are generated. The strategic plan is updated halfway through the year, with action items being labeled as complete, in process, no progress made or terminated. There is a justification column and an additional comments column, used to provide feedback to the college body on reasons for approval or denial.

5C2

The annual strategic planning process has been directly linked to budgeting for decades. However, the college made significant improvements in linking assessment with budgeting and planning when revising the strategic planning processes in 2016 as noted above. Emerging from the 2020 appreciative inquiry were focuses and priorities directly related to assessment and continuous improvement: Enhance and Sustain Excellence in Teaching and Learning -- Support innovative instructional activities, assessments, and delivery systems to enhance student learning; and Ensure Institutional Stability and Effectiveness -- Continuously improve college policies, processes, and systems to ensure long-term sustainability. The strategic plan also includes items which were sourced from assessment and program review information. Assessment of student learning is addressed more thoroughly in **4B**.

Advisory Committees review assessment information while conducting their annual planning activities (agenda template, packet examples); Advisory Committee packets are available for review. In 2017, the career technical education (CTE) programs began completing annual reports of their programs for the campus-wide Advisory Committee meetings held in March (examples).

These are overviews of each CTE program over the previous year and are handed out to the members of the Advisory Committees prior to their meetings. They provide information such as program headcount, number of degree and certificate majors, breakdowns of program student population, labor market information, curriculum changes, program goals and more. A similar report for the general education programs is being explored. This would provide the college with additional information and feedback upon which to make decisions.

Program reviews, discussed in **4A**, and productivity analyses, discussed in **5A**, also are used to inform decision-making.

5C3

The main strategic planning process includes every department of the college. Each department reviews the strategic plan annually and submits ideas generated by SOAR analyses, program reviews, Advisory Committees, departmental meetings or other methods, thus involving the entire institution in the process.

The District Site and Construction Master Plan is submitted every five years as required by the Illinois Community College Board. Information for this plan was gathered via input from a wide variety of sources. We engaged with students, staff, and community members through various methods to seek feedback regarding both what the college is currently doing well and what improvements are needed. Surveys were disbursed to gather quantitative and qualitative data to prioritize efforts and resources. Public listening sessions were held in Mt. Vernon and Pinckneyville to allow community members to have an open forum to discuss ideas and suggestions with members of leadership.

Operational feedback is gathered in other ways. Examples include feedback from employers regarding on-the-job training visits (evaluation template, examples); participation in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement; annual Advisory Committee meetings; meetings held on campus with high school counselors to discuss dual credit, transfer and other relevant issues (agenda); and more.

5C4

The institution has a sound understanding of its capacity and plans accordingly. Enrollment had been on a decline in Illinois, with COVID having a strong negative impact, yet with a slight uptick in enrollment in FY 2022 (ICCB trends), and RLC has seen the same trends (ICCB report, Fact Book). Despite an overall decrease in enrollment, the college has not increased tuition since its last comprehensive evaluation. As discussed in **5B4**, careful management of bonds, including restructuring for early payoffs and new issuances which do not increase taxpayer burden, continue to allow us to grow and progress. The RLC Foundation has funded major initiatives as

well, including a major remodel to the Mary and George Slankard Learning Resource Center (press release) and the recent kick-off of The Game Plan, a campaign to renovate the college's aging athletics facilities.

The college also has used grant funding to open up sustainable programs. The Title III Pathways to Success in Health Careers Grant from the Department of Education, worth up to \$2.25 million over five years (2013-2017 Fact Book), has been used to establish programs such as Pharmacy Technician and Medical Assistant, along with support services such as the CTE Success Center. The college is researching and planning to write for another major Title III grant; current grants are noted in the 2022 Fact Book. Recent grants noted there will help with the establishment of the Southern Illinois Manufacturing Academy, supporting apprenticeships and early childhood education, implementing competency-based curriculum, and more.

5C5

Institutional planning considers emerging factors. One is the change in focus from recruitment and credit hour generation to persistence, retention and completion, based in part on a declining student pool. The population of the college district has experienced a downward trend with few changes in demographics (ICCB census) and flat or decreasing high school populations. This has led to greater emphasis on retention activities, as evidenced by participation in HLC's Persistence and Completion Academy, our attendance at HLC's Student Success Workshop in 2018, and the increased prevalence and activity of the RL-Cares team (statistics). We also have restructured to create the Cabinet-level Dean of Student Success and Development position, which oversees recruitment, retention, career services, student wellness and RL-Cares. More about persistence, retention and completion can be found in 4C.

State funding also is a consideration in planning. In FY 2013, RLC received \$8,648,546 in state funding, compared to \$7,042,205 in FY 2022. Also notable was the allocation of only \$3,659,543 in FY 2016 during the state budget impasse. Examples of planning here include the bond issues discussed in 5B4, two of which were implemented in direct response to an expected lack of funding from the state. RLC was able to avoid the mass layoffs which affected other institutions in the state in large part due to prudent financial planning such as this. In recent years, we have budgeted in anticipation of receiving less revenue from the state than legislators predict.

The Information Technology Department has prepared a roadmap, which lists major projects such as the new ERP, Windows 11 migration, data security and others. It also provides guidance for possibilities such as the building out of SharePoint as a central information repository, for example. Shortly after our last comprehensive visit, the college shifted to a new LMS after informal student feedback resulted in Cabinet exploring Canvas as an alternative to Blackboard. After introductory web meetings and phone calls, a Canvas representative demonstrated the platform to faculty and staff. Some faculty already were using a free version of this LMS. Those in attendance were in favor of moving to Canvas, and the Board approved this in July 2018.

Additional examples of institutional planning based on emerging factors is the implementation of Darktrace and Crowdstrike in light of the increasing risk of cyberattack and ransomware; deployment of our in-house Wi-Fi system, Warrior Wireless, as a more reliable replacement to the previous third-party provider; and creation of the laptop and webcam loaner program, plus installation of more classroom cameras and monitors, in response to increased demand for remote learning after COVID, among others.

5C6

The college's strategic planning process, described above, flows from the mission, involves all levels of the college, and is the main way in which the college systematically improves its overall operations. Student success is systematically addressed and improved through comprehensive assessment at the institutional and program levels as described in **4B** and via the program review process outlined in **4A**.

Planning and improvement shows in the alliance between RLC and Southeastern Illinois College, an adjoining community college district. This partnership calls for the colleges to share their resources in order to become more effective and calls for at least two joint planning meetings annually. There is a plan for further improving this partnership through FY 2025. In addition to instructor sharing, RLC sends maintenance personnel to SIC on a contractual basis in order to help them complete more projects in-house, has collaborated on system programming and audiovisual set-up work, and currently shares a mental health professional.

Operational efficiency will be improved through the upgrade of the college ERP from PowerCampus to Colleague. This process began in 2022 with a demo from the vendor, to which anyone interested was invited. Those who saw the demo were invited to provide feedback, and neighbors who used Colleague and a competing product were consulted on Zoom calls for their input. The vast majority enthusiastically chose Colleague, with the Board of Trustees being informed in Fall 2022 and given the opportunity to offer their thoughts. With their approval, the college signed the upgrade agreement in December 2022 and the work of implementation continues as of this writing. This will improve the operations of various areas, including student records, business office, financial aid, human resources, institutional research, and others. Students will have improved access to their schedules and statements as well.

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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.

Summary

The college is in a strong financial position due to prudent planning and lean operations, despite declining state funding and population. RLC has the resources to carry out its mission and support its operations. A knowledgeable board governs RLC, and its constituents have input in its governance.

The revamped college-wide strategic planning process is more mission-driven and provides more data on the various objectives. The college is active in its implementation of initiatives, such as upgrading the ERP and LMS, pursuing grants to fund projects and initiatives like the Southern Illinois Manufacturing Academy, and partnering with Southeastern Illinois College to enhance the offerings and services of both institutions.

Sources

There are no sources.