Campus Evaluation Visit Report Form

Institution name: Kirtland Community College

Name and street address of branch campus: 4800 West Four Mile Road, Grayling, MI 49738

Date of visit: November 16, 2020

Reviewer(s): (List names, titles and affiliation of each peer reviewer)

Roberta C. Teahen, Ph.D., DCCL Program Director and Associate Provost Emeritus, Ferris State University

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The final report should be no more than 15 pages. The report begins with a general overview of the evaluation conducted and enough information about the campus and its operation to provide the context for an HLC decision or for review by a future evaluation team. For each review category, the team should indicate whether the institution fulfills the expectations of the category and provide 3-4 evidentiary statements that support the judgment. Within the evidentiary statements, the team should identify strengths, opportunities for improvement or any concerns.

A pattern of concerns across multiple categories may result in a recommendation for monitoring or may result in the team determining that the quality of the campus cannot be assured and that the campus should be closed.

Submit the completed report as a single PDF file at hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Final Reports" from the list of submission options to ensure the report is sent to the correct HLC staff member.

Overview

Provide background information about the institution's general approach to branch campus instruction. Describe the growth pattern at the institution since the last review, if applicable. Provide information about the involvement of external organizations or other higher education institutions.

Kirtland Community College had been operating primarily from its Roscommon campus that was established in the 1960s. It also operated locations in Gaylord and West Branch. In recent years, the current administration and Board had determined that the College would be better served by relocating to a more visible and more densely populated area in nearby Grayling. Contributing to this decision was the expense associated with maintaining a campus that was primarily built in the 1970s and was not well suited for today's technology use, energy efficiency, or current pedagogy. An additional goal of moving

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the main campus to Grayling, beyond the development of entirely new facilities at what was considered to be a more ideal location, was the consolidation of services and instructional programming.

Multiple community partners have been integral to the institution's strategy to relocate and build an entirely new campus. The first phase, a Health Sciences Center, was funded by a millage supported by the six school districts in 4 counties that comprise the college's funding district. Gaining millage support is commendable in these times, particularly when the geographic area served by the college is generally lower income and less highly educated. The second phase was built collaboratively with the Michigan Forest Institute, that maintains space for their programming and funded by the state of Michigan through a capital outlay allocation. Multiple wood manufacturers/producers are located in the service area, so this industry is an important employer for the college's students. These employers were also among those involved in planning for a greater presence for Kirtland in Grayling.

Another example of partnerships involved the transfer of operational responsibility to Kirtland for the University Center in Gaylord that was formerly operated by an independent entity and that transferred its assets to Otsego County, where Gaylord is located. This quotation from the public notice of this change highlights the confidence the Gaylord community has for the college: "Following 18 months of fact finding, discussion, and finalization, the agreement officially transferred all UC assets to Otsego County from the non-profit organization that previously managed the center. Kirtland Community College took over operations of the entire facility, located at 80 Livingston Boulevard, on Jan. 1." "The more we all talked, it became apparent a merger would be a good fit for all parties," said Ken Borton, the chairman of the Otsego County Board of Commissioners. "Kirtland knows how to run a successful operation. I look forward to a continued and mutually beneficial relationship for years to come."

History, Planning, and Oversight

Provide 3-4 evidentiary statements that demonstrate that the institution effectively plans for and oversees the growth and maintenance of the campus. Describe whether the financial planning and resource allocation have proven effective at the branch campus.

Judgment

☒ The evidence indicates that the institution fulfills the expectations of the category.

☐ The evidence indicates that there are concerns related to the expectations of the category.

Evidentiary Statements

The Grayling campus began with Health Sciences in 2016 and then a second phase developed the Michigan Forest Products Institute that opened in the Fall of 2019. The Grayling site was first approved as a location, but its development has always been a part of a longer-term strategic plan to relocate the main campus and most of the programs of Kirtland Community College to Grayling. Technical programs at the Gaylord location will continue at that site.

The 2019-2024 strategic plan of the college identifies a third addition to the Kirtland-Grayling campus in its facilities plans. The 2019-24 plan also specifies that this location will become a meeting and educational place for thousands each month and serve as a center for innovation and creativity. While that activity level has been significantly curtailed given the current Covid restrictions, there is every reason to believe that the future will see this level of utilization because of the attractiveness of the facilities, the flexibility of the various learning spaces, and the emerging development of a performing arts complex.

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The administration articulates a very concrete strategy to bring in representatives from school districts, employers, township officials, county officials, and citizens more generally so they can see the possibilities. Their marketing/communications strategies are designed to communicate the possibilities for use of the Grayling location. Touring prospective users has been limited recently, but these invitations to showcase the college's offerings/potential will resume as conditions allow.

The 2019-24 plan specifies that the West Branch and Roscommon campuses will no longer be needed. Important to readers' understanding of this change is the fact that the Roscommon campus is in a very rural area and is several miles from any town. The new location is at a major intersection near I-75 with a higher population base nearby. Conversations with the president and Director of Institutional Research reveal that the Roscommon campus is presently offered for sale, and if a sale is not forthcoming, other alternatives have been identified. Thus, continuing expenses of the Roscommon campus are not anticipated much beyond fall 2021 when Roscommon will no longer be an instructional location.

Phase 3 is under construction and anticipated to be open by Fall 2021, at which time the remaining Roscommon Campus programs, including Automotive and Criminal Justice, will be relocated to Grayling. The West Branch location has already been vacated. Thus, the remaining other location will be Gaylord, where many technical and industrial programs are located and where the institution operates the University Center for the community. All of the programs identified in the change request have been operationalized at the new Grayling location, with the exception of Health Information Technology, that has been discontinued as a result of program review processes that deemed the program unsustainable, given costs, enrollments, and employment outlook.

The move to Grayling could be considered a bold move, but the transition planning has been strong and the institution has managed the resources wisely by seeking funding for the first two phases. It is only the third phase, a $19 million investment, that has debt through bonding associated with it, and the President and other administrative staff report comfort with being able to meet the debt obligations, in part because operational expenses have been significantly reduced by the move to this modern facility. The bond interest rate is favorable, at just over 2%. Maintenance and operational costs at the Roscommon campus, that was built in the 1970s, were significant and growing. An extensive external experts' review of the site was provided that documented the deferred maintenance associated with the Roscommon campus. Annual operational savings (mostly heating and utilities) are expected to be at least $235,000.

The administration should be commended for its long-range perspective and the building of community partnerships that have enabled this successful transition. The first phase was built through a millage of the 6 school districts (aligned with Intermediate School District boundaries) in their four primary service counties. While enrollment projections of 4% growth were crafted pre-Covid, Kirtland was successful in experiencing a smaller enrollment decline than most other community colleges, and this high-visibility location, with a highly attractive presence at a busy intersection in a region of growth can reasonably be expected to yield positive enrollment results in the coming years. Consolidating their programming into two communities, Grayling and Gaylord, is another positive efficiency move.

Kirtland received a 6.1-million-dollar allocation from the state of Michigan to construct an addition to the Grayling campus, that is called Phase 2. The purpose of the addition was to provide academic programs to support employment in the expanding wood products industry near Grayling. Obviously, getting state funding had to be a multi-year and persistent effort to realize funding following the many stages of the state approval process.

Kirtland should also be commended for its 2018 effort to consolidate two separate millages in the Gaylord area for the UC and the M-TEC into one renewal millage that also reduced the total amount taxpayers would pay by 19%. While that should have been an easy sell, we also know

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how difficult communicating with a distributed population is for explaining a relatively complex financial matter. Obviously the college's efforts were successful, which speaks to effective strategy and communications, because that millage passed easily with 7269 yes and 3783 no and 58% of the registered voters participating.

Facilities and Technology

Provide 3-4 evidentiary statements that demonstrate that the institution has the facilities and technology at the campus to meet the needs of the students, the staff and faculty, and the educational offerings. In particular, consider classrooms and laboratories (size, maintenance, temperature, etc.); faculty and administrative offices (site, visibility, privacy for meetings, etc.); parking or access to public transit; bookstore or text purchasing services; security; handicapped access; and other facilities (food or snack services, study and meeting areas, etc.).

Judgment

☒ The evidence indicates that the institution fulfills the expectations of the category.

☐ The evidence indicates that there are concerns related to the expectations of the category.

Evidentiary Statements

The new Grayling facilities are designed to be all under one roof, a desirable attribute for cold Michigan winters, even though it is being built in three phases. The external façade is very attractive, with a wide welcoming main entrance with lots of glass, color attributes, high atrium ceilings, and inviting open spaces on the left, right, and straight ahead. To the left is what would often be referred to as a "one-stop student services center." Just beyond this on the left is an open bookstore area, that maintains few books in stock since most books are ordered online but presents a spirited image, with logo wear and more. Just beyond this is a cafeteria area where students can purchase food or prepare and consume items they bring to eat. It also has an open, welcoming appearance. Scattered throughout the atrium/entrance hall are upholstered pod seating areas with different fabrics, designs, and arrangements, that are designed to support students' gatherings. Immediately inside on the right is the future location of Biggby's Coffee, that students and staff are eager to see open. Further in on the right is the Learning Commons, with lots of glass and student study rooms. The second floor houses administrative offices. A corridor to the right off the entrance hall includes several faculty offices, conference rooms, and classroom spaces, including laboratories.

The new facility is better suited for maintaining a healthy internal environment, as the newer HVAC systems have state-of-the-art air handling systems. In addition, two custodial personnel have been added, and an easy-to-monitor cleaning protocol exists for cleaning meeting rooms and classrooms between each use and other strategies are being actively employed to maintain a healthy environment, such as disinfectant foggers. Administrators believe the new facility has enabled them to maintain a safer facility.

Technology is a strength at Kirtland. Some rooms are equipped with smart boards and all rooms have computer work stations, projection equipment, and a variety of technology support, such as document cameras. As one example, in the community room where all larger-group meetings were held, there was a computer projection station at the front, video cameras in multiple locations, and large-size screens in the front and back of the room. It was highly conducive to a large meeting, that has been made smaller with the spacing of tables and chairs to meet current physical

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limitations. In addition, multiple software products are in use to support instruction and services, such as Canvas for course management and Jenzabar for student records.

Administrators report that excess parking space exists, and that is likely a good plan given the emergence of the Performing Arts Center and the fact that a concern on many campuses is the availability of convenient parking at busy times. A large parking lot is adjacent to the main building, Phase 1.

A tour of the surgical technology, nursing, construction, automation labs, and cosmetology, among others, reveals an array of state-of-the art equipment that is representative of what would be found in the most modern employment settings. Rooms were exceptionally well maintained and well organized. Students and faculty all expressed gratitude for the ability to teach and learn in these state-of-the art facilities.

Human Resources

Provide 3-4 evidentiary statements that demonstrate that the institution has appropriately qualified and sufficient staff and faculty in place for the branch campus, and that the institution supports and evaluates personnel at off-campus locations. Consider the processes in place for selecting, training and orienting faculty at the location, as well as the credentials of faculty dedicated to the campus and other faculty.

Judgment

☒ The evidence indicates that the institution fulfills the expectations of the category.

☐ The evidence indicates that there are concerns related to the expectations of the category.

Evidentiary Statements

There are several new personnel in place at the institution as a result of a variety of factors, including retirement. Thus, many of the personnel interviewed have been there comparatively short times. The president has been there since 2007 (13+ years) and appears to be a primary driver of the institution's bold strategic and visionary moves. While new to Kirtland, the Vice President of Academic Services is a highly experienced and effective academic administrator who is well known throughout Michigan from her service at her prior, larger college. The Interim Dean of Occupational programs is a recognized expert in assessment and an experienced academic administrator. The Director of Institutional Research has been at the institution for about 19 years, serves as the HLC Liaison, and is clearly deeply immersed in the evaluation of data as well as the production of it. He is a refreshing institutional researcher who not only produces data but makes sense of it and works with others to assure its use. Administrative personnel are well qualified and experienced.

When asked if they felt supported by the administration, there was an unequivocal Yes from the faculty. The administration expressed great respect for the faculty, particularly as they were revitalizing their programs for a move to a new facility and simultaneously moving more to online instruction. Both the faculty and the administrators expressed the view that they felt "ahead of the curve" since they had historically been in the forefront of online instruction. Faculty were particularly grateful for the opportunity to plan their new educational spaces and for their support in online instruction. Collaboration among all groups at Kirtland appears strong.

Job descriptions and human resources information, including job postings, are available on the easy-to-navigate website. The Associate Director of Human Resources reports that hiring

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practices cast as wide a net as possible, utilizing national vehicles, so that they can attract the best talent and diversify their workforce. Given the rural location, the president does note that recruitment is sometimes challenging, and he expressed some concern about an additional upcoming retirement with the Nursing Director, as he recognizes the challenges of filling that position. Hiring practices are well documented and appear consistently applied.

Because the change request did not include a request for faculty qualifications, this review did not include confirmation of faculty qualifications through review of their files or resumes given the limited time on campus. The change request specifies that there is no change in required qualifications and having had multiple interactions with the HLC with site visits in recent years with these location changes, the institution is clearly aware of minimum qualifications expectations. Because so many of the programs are occupational – a niche Kirtland proudly claims – it is likely that some may have alternative qualifications. Given the institution's attention to documentation and compliance, and the fact that many of its programs have specialized accreditation that also prescribe faculty qualifications, we should anticipate that the institution is in compliance with meeting the HLC standards.

The reviewer's interaction with about 10 of the faculty revealed a knowledgeable, student-focused, technology-savvy group. Students spoke enthusiastically about their faculty, with nursing students in particular voicing the view that they felt well prepared for their clinical rotations in part because their faculty remained active in their nursing practice. When specifically asked (on the point of relevance) about their preparedness for work, all students (among the 10 who attended the session) believed that what they were learning was relevant to their future careers. Students in attendance were from surgical technology, nursing, and cosmetology – the courses in session that day.

The part-time faculty handbook, supplied in the change request, is extensive and provides valuable resources about assessment, pedagogy, and more, which further reflects the institution's commitment to quality instruction. A Teaching and Learning Center is available to support faculty, and the faculty leader of that is articulate about the work they do to support faculty in a variety of areas, including assessment and pedagogy.

Student and Faculty Resources and Support

Provide 3-4 evidentiary statements that demonstrate that the institution delivers, supports, and manages necessary student and faculty services and academic resources at the campus. Consider, in particular, the level of student access (in person, by computer, by phone, etc.) to academic advising/placement, remedial/tutorial services, and library materials/services. Also, consider the level of access to admissions, registration/student records, financial aid, and job placement services, as well as attention to student concerns. Finally, consider the resources needed by faculty to provide the educational offerings.

Judgment

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Evidentiary Statements

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An array of services is available to support students. Support for students is better coordinated as a result of the move to Grayling, as all of the services are co-located in a state-of-the-art facility designed for today's educational environment and technological needs. Attractive offices exist in the new facility, where extensive support for advising, career services, tutoring, a writing center, financial aid, and extensive referral services, such as to community food, housing, and transportation resources, can be accessed. Staff can coordinate more effectively given their office proximity. Evidence of the value of student services is partially provided through their use of CCSSE data, that is available on the website, and their close collaboration with students. Services are typical ones offered by most colleges. Students report that staff of the Learning Commons are responsive, helpful, and accessible. Of course, delivery of these services has changed, but conversations with student affairs personnel and advisors confirm that services continue remotely.

Administrative personnel were able to articulate the many ways in which they support students; faculty also reported active support of their students; and an array of students from multiple program areas interviewed in an open session attested to the institution's support for their success. Students described caring faculty and exceptionally helpful staff. Given that Kirtland is comparatively small, they appear to have maximized their ability to support students through their multiple community partnerships and their personalized environment.

Not mentioned earlier is the support for faculty and students in technology. At the outset of the COVID-induced shutdown, IT and academic personnel sought to determine how best to support their students technologically. Laptops were made available; hot spots were acquired; and when students live in remote areas (as many do) where Internet service is spotty or nonexistent, they encourage students to use the parking lot at the college where robust Wifi is available. While not ideal, for many, this is their best option because Kirtland serves a very rural area. Even administrators reported an inability from some parts of the district to connect with others on staff. A statewide challenge exists for many communities in this regard, as Broadband will become increasingly essential for life and work and many rural communities are underserved in this arena.

Given the times and the rural nature of this college, issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion may look different but remain important for consideration for the college, including its integration in the curriculum. Faculty were able to identify some ways in which these topics receive consideration but there may be additional opportunities to contribute to the dialogue, particularly given the demographics of the service area, that is predominantly White, low-income, and of lower educational achievement. Staff note that their current diversity is largely socio-economic.

Educational Programs and Instructional Oversight

Provide 3-4 evidentiary statements that demonstrate that the institution effectively oversees educational offerings and instruction at the campus. Identify whether the institution has adequate controls in place to ensure that information presented to students is adequate.

Consider, in particular, consistency of curricular expectations and policies, availability of courses needed for program and graduation requirements, performance of instructional duties, availability of faculty to students, orientation of faculty/professional development, attention to student concerns.

Judgment

☒ The evidence indicates that the institution fulfills the expectations of the category.

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Evidentiary Statements

Given the fact that there is typically one section of each of the occupational courses, and their offerings are sequential, there was no reported concern about the availability of courses for students to complete on time. Much is offered online, especially for general education, so there is considerable flexibility for students in completing these courses.

Coincidentally, this visit occurred the morning after the state announced that all colleges must move to online instruction. This administration was well prepared for this possibility, and the Vice President for Academic Services reported hosting a call with faculty on the weekend so she could assure that their interests were considered as the planning commenced for another shutdown within two days. This example of collaboration and respect for their input are important factors in the collegial environment observed.

When asked what could be improved at Kirtland, the students had no real complaints. Mostly they wished for more, such as the opening of the pending Biggby's coffee location; the desirability of offering courses closer to their homes (some were driving 2.5 hours to be in the nursing program), an additional printer in the Commons (although they were grateful that printing is free), and a desire for on-campus housing (that is being explored). Students mentioned having collaborative relationships with their faculty so they could jointly pursue resolution of any concerns and a particular example was provided about concerns about workload and their gratitude that the program director met with them to hear their concerns. Given the small environment, communications appear positive for resolving concerns and administrative personnel appeared known to the students.

Evaluation and Assessment

Provide 3-4 evidentiary statements that demonstrate that the institution (a) evaluates and improves the educational offerings of the campus, and (b) measures, documents, and analyzes student learning, persistence, and completion sufficiently to maintain and improve academic quality at the campus. Consider, in particular, the setting of outcomes, the actual measurement of performance, and the analysis and use of data to maintain/improve quality. Identify how the processes at a campus are equivalent to those for assessment and evaluation on the main campus.

Judgment

☒ The evidence indicates that the institution fulfills the expectations of the category.

☐ The evidence indicates that there are concerns related to the expectations of the category.

Evidentiary Statements

Assessment and evaluation are as they have been planned previously and as being improved with a new academic leadership team. For a comparatively small college, the assessment and evaluation are robust. The program review process is systematic, comprehensive, and has resulted in producing important program analysis data. As a result of a prior visit, a progress report was required on assessment, and that report was accepted by HLC. In conversations with the faculty and administrators, it seems that assessment is integral to ongoing operations. In addition to speaking about various accreditations that exist for many of the career programs, many spoke of the use of their CCSSE data and students' and staff's perceptions of student engagement. They spoke of licensing success and employment statistics. Faculty also spoke of informal

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communications as a way in which they gather information to improve instruction. An area for possible improvement may be attention to completion statistics, as there has been little change in those over the years. College personnel have recognized that need, however, as one of the faculty reports that her future work will include more attention to student success and completion and a posting for a new Student Success Coach exists.

Faculty were able to speak about the ways in which they can tag competencies in Canvas and use the data acquired to improve instruction. Comprehensive guidance is provided to the faculty in how to link competencies to course objectives and more. This guidance is documented so faculty can refer to it as needed. Faculty note that the same measurements are used in the classes, and they spoke of functional early-alert systems to intercede if students were falling behind. The faculty are aware of the focus for increasingly more effective assessment of student learning as they report they do a lot of internal analysis.

Continuous Improvement

Provide 3-4 evidentiary statements that demonstrate that the institution encourages and ensures continuous quality improvement at the campus. Consider in particular the institution's planning and evaluation processes that ensure regular review and improvement of the campus and ensure alignment of the branch campus with the mission and goals of the institution as a whole.

Judgment

☒ The evidence indicates that the institution fulfills the expectations of the category.

☐ The evidence indicates that there are concerns related to the expectations of the category.

Evidentiary Statements

Bringing the multiple locations together into a main campus has been an immense improvement that was coupled with some simultaneous curricular improvement. The program review and assessment processes are robust, and plans exist for continuing to improve these by inclusion of more qualitative and assessment data into the program review processes.

The Vice President of Academic Services expressed the view that she frequently asks, "What else could we be doing." She notes that they recently revised the Information Technology program to better meet the many jobs available in that field and this decision evolved from the program review process, as did the elimination of a program.

General education faculty felt they could benefit from larger and designed somewhat differently general classroom spaces; however, their recommendations were likely easily accomplished – redirecting cameras. They also note that they wish classrooms were larger, now given the distancing challenges; however they acknowledge that no one foresaw this challenge.

Both the on-campus interviews and the 2019-24 strategic plan reveal a college committed to innovation. The strategic plan enumerates Kirtland's many competitive advantages, including its technical education market; its strong, committed faculty who deliver online or on campus; its newly accessible location; and its recognition as a top 50 college of quality of online learning. Further, its first assumption for planning in the area of students and instruction reads: "Faculty will continue to seek new and innovative methods of instruction that have application to learning in both the workplace and world environments" and the second is that "digital technologies will increasingly become integrated into instruction." Indeed, the faculty, the administration, and the IT leader all

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note that a great strength was the college's current level of engagement with technology. They seemed ready to make the move in two days to totally remote instruction, although students clearly expressed disappointment in this need.

Summary Recommendation

Select one of the following statements and include, as appropriate, a summary of findings.

☒ Confirm approval of the new campus based on evidence that the institution has the capacity to sustain quality at the campus and thus meets HLC expectations as defined in its Criteria for Accreditation. No monitoring is necessary.

Rationale

As the prior sections should reveal, this visit finds a college that has been both bold and strategic, in my experience, by envisioning the relocation of a campus and building all new facilities in a nearby community. Further, they wove together a plan that included state funding, local millage elections, fund-raising, and partnerships to fund this ambitious venture. They have convened a highly experienced team of leaders that can guide their strategic plan, and they have convinced the communities of service (four counties and the largest geographic service district in Michigan) to "buy in" to their plan through voter approvals of the funding. Finally, they have weathered the angst of the community they left as faculty, students, and others have acknowledged the many benefits of the new location.

The new facility is enviable. Many faculty would love to have such attractive, well equipped facilities. This new branding of Kirtland is sure to pay long-term dividends in enrollments, community partnerships for additional programming, attractiveness to local high school students, and more. Given these Covid times, news reports reveal that many are relocating to rural areas from urban communities, which this community is likely to benefit from as more recognize they are able to work remotely.

One could anticipate that funding would be the challenge for this venture, but audited financial statements show an institution in excellent position to weather the short-term challenges of diminished enrollments and to adequately invest in quality for the future.

☐ Confirm approval of the new campus based on evidence that the institution has the capacity to sustain quality at the campus and thus meets HLC expectations as defined in its Criteria for Accreditation. However, concerns identified in the review indicate that monitoring is necessary.

Rationale and Expectations

Monitoring Required

☐ Deny continued approval of the campus based on evidence that the institution lacks the capacity to sustain quality at the campus as defined in HLC's Criteria for Accreditation. The evidence indicates that the campus should be closed in accordance with HLC policies and procedures on teach out.

Rationale

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