

Accreditation Report
Comprehensive State Evaluation

Southeastern Community College

February 23-24, 2021

FY 2021



**COMMUNITY COLLEGES &
WORKFORCE PREPARATION**
PROSPERITY THROUGH EDUCATION

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Comprehensive Accreditation Evaluation
FY 2021 (Academic Year 2020-2021)**

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**Southeastern Community College (SCC)
Comprehensive State Accreditation Evaluation
FY 2021 – Conducted February 23-24, 2021**

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this review was a scheduled accreditation evaluation of Southeastern Community College by the Iowa Department of Education as mandated by Iowa Code Section 260C.47.

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

College History¹

When Ray Bracewell presented a proposal to the Burlington School Board in 1919 to establish the state's second two-year college, he was at the forefront of a major movement in higher education. That simple recommendation opened a door to educational opportunities that would propel area students to attain their goals for decades to come.

And though the world has changed exponentially since Burlington Junior College (BJC) welcomed its first students in 1920, people's needs remain the same. Serving as BJC's first president, Bracewell cited three main reasons why one should attend the college in lieu of starting at a 4-year school in its 1925 annual report. These reasons were (1) it is more economical, (2) better instruction is offered, and (3) it provides a smooth transition from high school life to university life.

Over 100 years later, these continue to be the most common reasons why students choose SCC. In the beginning, BJC offered basic education courses such as chemistry, math and English. These core classes served the needs of the college's students, many of whom sought careers in education. As time went on, college leadership recognized the increasing need for career and technical education (CTE) and began to develop programs relevant to local industry so students could learn the crucial skills that would fuel America's post-war economic boom. That prosperity would also be a driving force for Keokuk, where visionary leaders established Keokuk Community College (KCC) as part of the city's public school system in 1953.

In 1965, the State of Iowa passed Senate File 550 establishing the current community college system. As community colleges consolidated into designated districts the following year, BJC and KCC merged to become Southeastern Community College (SCC).

With a refined mission and dedicated funding from the state, SCC was positioned to provide even more educational opportunities for residents throughout the region, adding 25 career education programs to support local business and industry. This would go on to serve the region as it navigated the economic crises of the '70s and '80s.

Today, students can choose from three dozen CTE programs, including those in agriculture, automotive technology, autobody, business, education, health, IT and multimedia fields. One area of study that continuously changes is the field of industrial technology. By the mid-2000s, companies in Lee County struggled to find skilled workers. They turned to SCC for help and worked together to develop a program that would meet their needs.

The result was SCC's industrial maintenance technology program. Students can take stackable classes as they earn credentials leading to a degree. A capital campaign enabled the construction of the Industrial Technology Training Center on the Keokuk campus in 2015 to house specialized

training labs for mechanical and electrical instruction where students get hands-on training.

SCC expanded its technology offerings with the addition of the only two-year animation program in Iowa and retooled its graphic communication program to keep up-to-date with the business side of social media and digital communication. As the college continues to expand its programs, it also explores innovative ways to deliver classes. SCC helped develop the Iowa Community College Online Consortium (ICCO). The Consortium was founded in 1999 to offer online courses and resources for seven participating Iowa community colleges.

What began with about 200 students now serves thousands of students across Iowa, averaging a third of all SCC enrollments every semester. In 100 years, about 100,000 students have walked through the doors of SCC with determination to make their dreams a reality. For 100 years, the college has continuously reinvented itself as part of its commitment to serve the region.

Institutional Profile²

Southeastern Community College is a public institution of higher education which encompasses all of Des Moines, Henry and Lee counties and part of Louisa county in southeast Iowa, which has a total population of approximately 100,000. SCC's service area is bordered by the Mississippi River and Illinois on the east and Missouri on the south and is governed by a five-member Board of Trustees elected from and by the citizens of five separate director districts. SCC is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. In 2019, the college ranked 11th in total enrollment in the state with 3,596 students, 13th in the number of joint enrollment students and 8th in the percentage of students taking part in distance learning. SCC was 5th in the number of credit awards. SCC has improved its graduation, transfer and success rates in recent years, ranking 7th in student graduation rate and 5th in student transfer rate, resulting in a success rate of 7th in the state. The college was 15th in noncredit enrollment (12th in noncredit contact hours), while the region led the state in adult literacy.

¹ Information for this section was obtained primarily from the SCC website.

² Information for this section was obtained from the SCC website and the Community College Profile Report put together from the MIS.

SPECIAL TOPIC SUMMARY – COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

As a part of Southeastern's comprehensive accreditation visit, the college is interested in transitioning a few CTE programs to Competency Based Education (CBE). They would like to start with their Industrial Maintenance Technology program and will move to their Welding and Auto Collision programs. They ask for their colleagues at other community colleges to share their journey of CBE. Kirkwood (KCC) and Northeast Iowa (NICC) are the furthest along in their experiences with the CBE Network. Kirkwood has developed both a Business Management AAS and Project Management diploma, which are approved by HLC for noncredit and credit, and NICC has developed both a Business Administration Certificate and a Welding diploma. Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) and Iowa Western (IWCC) also shared their interest in CBE going forward. Southeastern asked questions regarding best practices for prior learning; aligning the program with the Higher Learning Commission; aligning the program with local 9-12 programs of study; the best ways to educate stakeholders, such as high school counselors, industry partners and the greater public and the balance of general education and OJT competencies.

Some other agreed upon CBE components discussed among partners in the conversation were:

- Develop local definitions and commitment
- Obtain top-down support and communicate with everyone
- Fit components into semester timelines to help with financial aid
- Use OER resources where possible as a benefit to students
- Pilot some initial classes first before offering a whole program
- Consider the value-added proposition for students to help various student populations
- Offer credit for prior learning connections
- Use a student success coach as a key role

ASSURANCE SUMMARY STATE STANDARDS

The SCC 2016 interim college visit resulted in only one finding where the college had some outstanding faculty follow-up issues in the area of faculty qualifications. The state formally conducted another review in 2017 to ensure that the college was in compliance with Iowa Code, which was completed satisfactorily.

Compliance with Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Criteria

The Iowa Department of Education's state accreditation team (Department) reviewed the most recent report and information available from the HLC at the time of this evaluation. Southeastern Community College's (SCC's) most recent HLC accreditation letter provided adequate evidence that the college has continuing regional accreditation with no issues, concerns or findings documented. HLC stated that SCC data use is systematic, the highest form of data use represented, and that they are invested in continuous quality improvement. SCC is moving to the Open Pathway; they chose this in order to have continuous improvement as part of their accreditation process. Some of the recent improvements that HLC or the team noted for SCC include:

- the college added an adjunct evaluation process;
- program review increased the assessment of college and program indicators;
- program outcome curriculum mapping includes transfer majors;

- implementation of a shared governance model is evident and systemic with both the Higher Education Association and Employee Support Association having two representatives serving on the Cabinet, the operating budget committee, the facilities budget committee and leading the quality faculty committee;
- the college's PACE survey (employee benchmarking survey) results were positive even while experiencing college budget declines and
- the president meets with all new employees about the college's values and weaves those values into college initiatives. The students mentioned the values in the interviews and were aware of them across the institution.

Compliance with Iowa State Accreditation Standards

Faculty Qualifications

All community college-employed instructors who are under contract as of July 1, 2011 who teach in career and technical education (CTE) or arts and sciences (including adjuncts) are required to meet minimum faculty standards (Iowa Code, Section 260C.48). The Department accreditation team reviewed a random sample of faculty personnel files provided by the human resources office to ensure compliance with this standard.

The Department team provided a random list of 20 faculty members who taught credit courses in the previous year for whom SCC provided personnel files regarding qualifications, with supporting documentation such as college transcripts, employment applications to illustrate related work experience and third-party licensure/certification, if applicable. Members of the Department team then examined the files to determine whether the qualifications of each faculty member complied with current Iowa Code faculty standards for the courses he or she taught during FY 2020 (i.e., fall term 2019 and spring 2020).

Following a thorough review of the 20 random faculty personnel files, members of the Department team met with SCC's chief academic officer and human resources director to learn about the college's faculty qualification review process and to discuss a few concerns raised during the review. The forms that the college utilizes to document the courses taught and prefixes qualified are consistent and thorough. Overall, the SCC have high qualifications and experiences in the fields in which they are teaching. There was only one remaining faculty qualifications issue remaining at the end of the visit regarding a faculty who was teaching a coaching class and how the college was documenting the professional tested experience. The college provided updated materials to document the instructor's experience in the coaching field and will follow the IDOE recommendations for documenting the tested field experience in those cases where the coaches do not have graduate qualifications in the coaching discipline.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Faculty Teaching Load

The teaching loads of full-time instructors must not exceed the faculty load limits set forth in Iowa Code. This is the case for CTE instructors, as well as for college parallel (arts and sciences) instructors (Iowa Code, Section 260C.48). To check compliance with this standard, the Department accreditation team reviewed the instructional loads of a random sample of 20 faculty

members for whom SCC provided documentation of their FY 2020 (fall 2019 and spring 2020 terms) teaching loads.

SCC updated and clarified their load process in 2019. Through a collaborative process involving staff and faculty, SCC approved Administrative Guideline 108 in AY20-21 which created more consistency in how load was calculated. As allowed per a waiver, some faculty were teaching on a beyond-overload basis during the current year due to the COVID pandemic and because of the use of much smaller class sizes, but SCC plans to return to normal class sizes for the Fall 2021, so this should no longer be necessary. The college's overload process is documented well through mutual consent; however, the college is working on a way to simplify that process for both faculty and administration and we **recommend** that the college pursue that update.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Special Needs

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

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

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

- Increasing membership of the SCC Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee from 6 to 18 members.
- Offering professional development to faculty and staff college-wide using SafeColleges modules and other relevant training. Monthly project plans are approved by the Board.
- Creating an ADA/Accessibility Committee in 2017 to address accessibility and compliance issues across the college that includes creating an accessibility course in Canvas and a course accessibility checklist in Hawknet that all faculty can access for training as a way to focus on universal design and accessibility.

- Utilizing Maxient software to document and track student issues and follow a grievance process.
- Informing students of the accommodation process and educating faculty on accommodation needs and implementation so students feel supported and valued.
- Promoting efforts related to diversity, accessibility, TRiO, tutoring and scholarship opportunities (e.g. Pace; Last Dollar; Alumni) to support students. Students were well informed and appreciative of all of these various efforts.
- Adopting, using and growing Open Education Resources (OER) with 6-7 faculty early adopters and a staff librarian on the statewide OER team.
- Having a Disability Coordinator that travels between campuses to meet with students and families, in addition to creating a comprehensive disability manual that is informative to all faculty, staff, students and their families.

The team commends SCC on naming the office that assists students with disabilities as accommodation services instead of disability services on the website. The team **recommends** that the college also consider utilizing the best practice outlined by the ADA National Network to focus on the positive terms of accessibility where possible. For example, SCC can consider changing the title of the disability coordinator title to accessibility coordinator and updating the disability manual name to the accessibility manual.

The team interviewed students during the visit and found that not all students were aware of the college's Title IX training and thought that it was only required for athletes or students in housing. In discussion with staff and leadership, it was confirmed that only athletes and students in housing were held accountable for training. The team **recommends** that SCC review and firm up the Title IX training requirement and compliance for students prior to the college's next equity visit.

In the document review of nondiscrimination statements, the annual statement is compliant with requirements, but is currently only published in English. The team **recommends** that the annual statement be made available in other languages to meet the needs of the current and prospective student population. SCC indicated that the college website will be updated during summer 2021, and that adding a translation option will be a part of the new website.

The team found that the continuous statement is consistent and includes all required components and contact information where it was found to be published; however, there are a few instances where the continuous statement was not found in the following major publications: Strategic Plan, Quality Faculty Plan, Facilities Plan and Faculty Concurrent Enrollment Handbook.

Finding: The continuous nondiscrimination statement must be prominent, and included in all major plans, publications and handbooks and within employment information directed at employees. The DE team will review this standard again after **September 15, 2021** to ensure that the continuous statement is prominent and included in the Strategic Plan, Quality Faculty Plan, Facilities Plan and Faculty Concurrent Enrollment Handbook.

CTE Program Evaluations and Timelines

There are a variety of state standards related to the offering of career and technical education (CTE) programs included in Iowa Code, Chapter 258, 281—IAC 46.7(4), and 281—IAC 24.5(4). These standards include numerous requirements related to program and award length, program

content, labor market demand, articulation, advisory committees and more. All CTE programs (including new programs and changes to existing programs) must be approved by the Department. Standards for CTE programs are included in the *Program Approval: Guidelines for Iowa Community Colleges* and in the *State Accreditation Guide* on the Department website.

The Department reviews the catalog database of CTE programs for its approval process and checks it against the college's approved list of programs and courses. This platform performs compliance checks on all CTE programs offered by each college. The Department accreditation team reviewed this compliance check for SCC's CTE programs to ensure compliance with the state program standards. For the standards regarding program advisory committees' composition, roles and responsibilities, the Department team reviewed a random sample of CTE advisory committee membership lists and meeting minutes to ensure compliance.

Additionally, community colleges are required to review at least 20 percent of their CTE programs annually, standards for which are provided in the aforementioned program approval guideline on the Department website. The Department team reviewed SCC's CTE program review process, schedule and a random sample of recent CTE program reviews to ensure compliance with the CTE program review standards. The documentation showed a tremendous amount of data was reviewed and collected and that the process shared the data in a systematic way by the institutional research office. There was a wealth of data available to the programs for the evaluation of program outcomes and the advisory boards had access to the data as well. The team found the CTE program review dashboard table of contents useful, the Perkins data learning outcomes inclusion assessment valuable and the profitability/financial analysis calculations beneficial.

The team **recommends** building more narrative in the program evaluation with increased analysis of data and outline of plans, goals and recommendations to address next steps. An emphasis on what the program or faculty can do as a result to enhance outcomes was initially unclear to the outside observer. In the interview, faculty were a bit hesitant to share how they analyze and make decisions on the data, so this could be an area to build knowledge of the program review process. On the other hand, the examples shared about the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)/improvement plan process show great project output with recruitment, marketing and program improvement strategies. The additional welding example shared after the visit shows that this business plan process with associated "data keys" is a potential best practice.

The team **recommends** that the advisory board template form be used more broadly to collect minutes and record topics discussed, if it is completed by each program. Some faculty mentioned that they use it to record recommendations, but it was not as evident in our samples regarding curriculum, course/program competencies, budget/equipment needs and student learning outcomes. The division of CTE advisory board manual shared during our visit with the college also has samples to utilize. The team recommends the college continue to find ways to diversify advisory board membership across all aspects of diversity.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Catalog/CurricUNET Review

The Department quality program consultant conducted a manual comparison of SCC's approved CTE programs in CurricUNET's database with those provided in their college catalog. During this comparison, it was found that the college had a number of differences between their printed

catalog and the state's database in terms of matching program credits, general education credits, general education categories and technical core. Since fall, the college has made a major overhaul of the catalog to include listing of all awards (AAS, diploma, certificates) and now lists all credit hours for all awards within the programs. Program titles now match and programs that are no longer offered have been deactivated.

The college has a well-developed section for the transfer majors that they offer and how they fit into student program options, and placement charts in the catalog are also clear and easy to follow. The college does a nice job of tying all of their student success initiatives together and their co-curricular assessment is outlined in the catalog. The syllabi clearly map general learning outcomes for each course.

Physical Plant and Facilities

Each community college must present evidence of adequate planning, including a board-approved facilities plan. The community college's plan must meet state and federal requirements as outlined in the state accreditation guide. The Department accreditation team reviewed SCC's facilities plan and interviewed the SCC staff regarding the college's facility planning process and decision-making structure to ensure compliance with this standard.

The SCC virtual campus tour was highlighted by state-of-the-art Health Sciences Building, virtual reality classroom, campus art, the z-space (3-D planning), automotive, 3-D animation/printer and other CTE labs.

The desk review showed a thorough, compliant and comprehensive facilities master plan for 2021-2028 and was last approved by the Board of Trustees in May 2020. The plan includes updates on recent facility plans as well as projects currently underway. Planning in eight-year increments allows campus leadership to think about both short- and long-term needs. The plan is updated annually to remain current. The process by which the master campus plan is created and updated allows for community feedback. At the beginning of each year, staff and faculty are given an opportunity to submit concerns or ideas for improvement of facilities. This open communication culture allows staff and faculty the opportunity to communicate necessary information about program and student needs and priorities.

In reviewing the facilities plan, recent and upcoming major facility projects address updates related to accessibility, safety and security. In talking with staff, it was clear that the culture at SCC is to go above and beyond to meet a student's individual ADA needs. SCC's facilities master plan also includes IT. The campus has a strong IT Security Awareness Process and Technology & Equipment Process. Safety mechanisms and processes are in place for facilities, student issues, information safety, weather and COVID-19.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Strategic Planning

Community colleges are required to update their strategic plans at least every five years as a guide for the community and its decision-making (Iowa Code section 256.31(4)(a)). The

Department accreditation team reviewed SCC's most recent strategic plan and interviewed selected staff to ensure compliance with this standard. The College is in the middle of a strategic plan that started in 2017 and runs through 2022. The plan was approved by the board in December 2017. Both the previous plan and current plan meet compliance requirements with clear goals, objectives and metrics in place. The plan appears to have been developed with input from both internal and external stakeholders.

The current strategic plan has several strengths identified by the team. New funds were obtained via a Title III SIP Grant for \$2.02 M for GPS. A bond levy passed overwhelmingly for \$15M, which is being used for capital improvements and scholarships. The plan has led to major facilities improvements, including a new Hall of Sciences and a new state of the art Health Professions building. The strategic plan has also led to improvements in transparency/communication; diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives with the creation of a DEI Council; distance learning programs and academic programming and assessment.

The team found evidence that the College's leadership team is very committed to the strategic plan and especially the vision, mission and values. Mission, vision, values, as well as a commitment to shared governance, are woven throughout the strategic plan and are appropriately tied to budget. The former strategic plan clearly identifies which key strategic goals and initiatives will continue under the next strategic plan. Another promising practice is that individual unit areas across campus have each created Divisional Tactical Plans that flow up into the campus-level strategic plan, ensuring alignment of campus priorities.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Quality Faculty Plan

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

SCC's QFP was last approved by the Board in June 2020 and the QFP committee meets regularly as evidenced by the committee minutes and activities. All compliance requirements appear to be met. Due to the recent passing of the chair of the QFP, the group is regathering and beginning to regain momentum.

The QFP forms appear clear and helpful for faculty. Another best practice is the effort underway to create an online orientation option for faculty, which will be particularly helpful to part-time adjunct faculty that are often unable to attend the face-to-face orientation. It should also be noted that at least seven students mentioned that the high-quality faculty are the thing they like best about attending SCC.

The team **recommends** the addition of the nondiscrimination statement to the QFP document. The team also **recommends** that administration consider database automation options of record keeping for data analysis/retrieval.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Senior Year Plus Programs

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

SCC's concurrent enrollment program is referred to as the SCC Jump Start! program. Currently, fourteen high schools partner with SCC to offer concurrent enrollment courses: twelve public schools and two private schools. The program offers 75 courses per semester, 65% of which are CTE. SCC's Jump Start! program has received NACEP reaffirmation through 2027-2028. The Jump Start! program coordinator is a peer reviewer for NACEP, which has helped program leaders understand and implement best practices required by NACEP.

The team would like to commend SCC's Jump Start! program for a number of observed best practices. First, all concurrent enrollment faculty use the institution's learning management system (LMS), Canvas, for grading, syllabus access and assessment. Adjunct faculty are given a course shell as a basis to build out their course. This practice ensures continuity in instructional and assessment outcomes, and that the same assessment and qualification requirement processes are followed by all faculty. Reviewers were also pleased to hear that SCC staff visit every single concurrent enrollment class to welcome students, discuss "college status" implications, discuss available resources and clarify CTE or transfer course requirements. This hands-on touch is extremely helpful to students as they navigate a college course, perhaps for the first time. Finally, reviewers noted that all Concurrent Enrollment faculty receive SCC background checks. Per guidelines, SCC would be allowed to use the high school background check process, but they run all faculty through their own SCC process.

The team **recommends** that the concurrent enrollment handbook include guidance directing staff, prior to hiring a new concurrent adjunct faculty member, to check that the person does not have a suspended high school teaching license. The college should also review the faculty concurrent enrollment handbook for nondiscrimination language. While the statement is listed in the syllabus template appendix at the end of the document, it is not listed in the primary portion of the handbook.

The team also **recommends** that administration review Administrative Guideline 341 #4 for outdated language on students who can take concurrent enrollment courses to indicate that all high school students are eligible. Finally, for privacy and security reasons, the team **recommends** that SCC administration review the practice of using the last six digits of a student's social security number as a password. The college could consider using a different password entirely and/or requiring students to reset their password after using this initial temporary password to access college systems.

Finding: No compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Compliance with Non-accreditation State or Federal Requirements

Finding: No non-accreditation compliance issues were noted during the evaluation.

Evaluation Team Recommendation

The Iowa Department of Education community college accreditation team recommends continued accreditation for Southeastern Community College.

A state interim accreditation evaluation is scheduled for FY 2026 (i.e., Academic Year 2025-2026).