

Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College  
Post Audit Review – Additional Follow-up Report  
May 15, 2012

Program: Health Care Professional, Associate in Applied Science

The West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education accepted the post-audit review follow-up report for the Associate in Applied Science, Health Care Professional program at Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College at its meeting on April 12, 2012. However, the Council requested an additional follow-up report detailing the status of the students enrolled in the program and the reasons the program has had so few graduates.

The Health Care Professional program was designed to allow individuals interested in a career in health care the flexibility to design a curriculum tailored to meet their educational goals. Currently students choose from two tracks, Allied Health or Management. Those seeking the Allied Health track may work in hospitals, clinics, home health agencies, and physician offices. Individuals seeking the Management track may work as Healthcare Professionals in the areas of hospital administration, office management, and other support positions. Graduates from either track have a firm foundation for understanding complex medical issues facing today's society. This program has been offered since the 2007-08 academic year.

Health Care Professional graduates may transfer to other colleges and universities. Articulation agreements are currently being established with Marshall University, The University of Charleston, West Virginia State University, and Wheeling Jesuit University. Graduates will be able to obtain a bachelor's degree in a variety of health care fields at either of these institutions.

The Health Care Professional program lacked direction and focus during the first two years of existence. Since this is an open enrollment program, no application or admission criteria is required, therefore, many students, as well as faculty and staff, were unsure of the program requirements. Additionally, a dedicated allied health advisor was not available to promote the program or guide the students in the right direction. This changed when the Department Chair for Allied Health and Nursing assumed the role of academic advisor for students enrolled in the program.

It has taken a few semesters to familiarize the students, faculty, and staff with this program and the benefits of the degree. This is believed to be one of the reasons for low graduation rates. In addition to the lack of familiarity with the program requirements, other factors related to the low graduation rates include the lack of a program advisor and the fact that some student in the Health Care Professional program transfer when they are admitted to other health-related programs such as Nursing, Radiologic Technology, or Medical Laboratory Technology.

To address the low number of graduates, several corrective actions have already been put in place. First, an increased emphasis has been placed on educating the college community about the opportunities available to graduates of this program. Due to these and other efforts, there has been an increase in the number of students declaring Health Care Professional as a major. As of the spring 2012 semester, there were 412 students with this program as their declared major.

To address low graduation rates, the Health Care Professional curriculum was revised during the 2011-12 academic year. Significant changes to the curriculum include the elimination of two program options and a reduction in the number of elective hours required. The eliminated options (Allied Health and Management Tracks) were replaced with a set of restricted elective courses. This will provide students the opportunity to customize the curriculum to meet their individual educational goals. These curricular changes will be effective in the fall 2012 semester.

In addition to the curricular changes, the Department Chair for Allied Health and Nursing is now reviewing the transcripts of students enrolled in the Health Care Professional program, as well as recent graduates of other health-related programs who were previously enrolled in the Health Care Professional program. Individuals will be notified and advised of the courses they need to complete in order to obtain the Health Care Professional degree.

Although graduation rates have been low, there has been a significant increase in the number of graduates during the most recently completed academic year. The number of graduates increased from three during the 2010-2011 academic year to 10 in 2011-2012 representing a significant increase in the number of graduates over a two year period.

Based on the actions already taken and the increased interest in the program based on the number of program majors in the spring 2012 term, it is anticipated that graduation rates will continue to improve over the next three to five years.