



HLSCC's **Academic Plan** 2015-2018



Intended Purpose and Use of This Resource

The big picture is that, the Virgin Islands is a small dependent Territory whose natural resources are its “**people**”, **sun**, **sand** and **sea**, and it must daily compete against the natural resources-rich developed, developing and under-developed countries of the world. Additionally, most of those nations are key players in major trade and defense alliances, and voting blocks. On top of that, the Territory imports close to 70% of its labour force. There are significant risks in all of these variables to be managed by this Territory.

In light of these precarious situations, coupled with the nation building agenda of the College’s vision and mission, the College as a whole must work smartly, tirelessly, swiftly and in synchrony to fully embrace the scientific dimension of education, which defines educational best practice in all of its applications. This is necessary if the institution is to optimise its levels of effectiveness, efficiency and productivity, en-route to becoming a “leading effective institution of higher education” by international standards. Such an achievement bodes well for the Territory’s ability to consistently compete well in a global economy, and exceed our vision of becoming the regional college of choice.

The overarching purpose of the Academic Plan, much of which is who we already are, and what we do, is to establish a clear and concise philosophical, theoretical, standardized and operational path and definition of the College’s academic enterprise, for quality assurance and control, as well as effectiveness and productivity purposes. This resource is therefore designed to serve as a source of reference for all College constituents, particularly the faculty, students, staff and administration as it relates to key academic orientations (e.g. philosophical guiding principles, academic values, criteria for excellence, curriculum and pedagogical orientations, alignment with the Strategic Plan and accreditation standards, etc.). It is also designed to serve as a barometer for performance expectations (standards of performance, product through puts and output, etc.). Moreover, it is also designed to assure a certain high level of regard and provision for the faculty and staff in order to help motivate them to optimal levels of performance and self-actualisation, *as well as help integrate curriculum, instruction and assessment, as well as the work agendas of the teaching and learning units with those of the support services departments and committees.*

This Academic Plan is therefore expected to help ensure that all constituents are purposefully working to ensure delivery on the same mission, vision, strategic goals, objectives and strategies *related to teaching, learning and student success* along the same philosophical and best practice-oriented lines. This is critical as a significant amount of incoming students enter the institution with multiple deficits and challenges each academic year, which must be addressed and remedied using the scientific dimension of education (best practice).

Once ratified in an inclusive manner, it is expected that all constituents will familiarize themselves with the provisions of the document, and ensure that they deliver on the implementation strategies, and are working within the bounds of the Academic Plan, which

are considerable. Within a few years of this document coming on stream, it is expected that objective reports coming from other institutions of higher learning, employers, managers and supervisors will show that HLSCC graduates are indeed proving to be optimally effective in senior institutions of higher learning, and the work place.

Once ratified, it is also expected that the various support services and committees will **purposefully** use this document as a guide in the development of their respective work plans in order to ensure that the classroom experience and performance of each and every faculty member and student is of the highest possible quality and level of effectiveness. It must be the case that there is a concerted effort in place to ensure that the faculty and students are empowered to succeed and indeed realise self-actualisation.

1. Introduction

As the only *public* tertiary level educational institution in the Virgin Islands, the core of the H Lavity Stoutt Community College's vision is nation building, continuous empowerment and success of the people and country, *and preparation of its students for success in the world of work and/or academia*. The College takes its mandate and incoming student challenges seriously, and is committed to consistently improving on the quality, relevance, performance and success of its educational products (programmes and services), and success rate of its students. On the support side, the College continues to seek out and find effective ways and means of improving its organisational structure, operating systems, programme offerings, and output quality and levels. Relative to its core of teaching and learning, in addition to the many successes and name recognition already established locally, regionally and internationally, the College's strategic plan (via Priority #1 Objectives 1-9, but especially objective #7) is taking the institution more aggressively into a best practice-oriented direction, which needs to be buttressed with clearly articulated philosophical, pedagogical, expected performance standards, output targets and orientations.

This Academic Plan is expected to readily provide constituents, particularly faculty and students with a representative snapshot of these types of established orientations. It is expected to help ensure that all constituents are continuously working purposely towards the same goals and objectives. Moreover, this Academic Plan (**AP**) is also expected to advance the College's accreditation gains by providing the College's teaching and learning parameters and expectations in one document, which should help to enhance information distribution and pedagogical awareness. The College has invested heavily in its quest to become accredited by the Middle States Commission of Higher Education. This AP is expected to help the institution fast track its initiative to ensure best practice across all spheres of its academic operations, as a result of helping to integrate the College's **strategic plan**, with the **fundamental elements**, and **academic quality assurance and control initiatives**, which are all best practice-oriented and designed to optimise the mission attainment impact.

That integration process will take some time to reach optimal performance levels and yield the type and quantum of results envisioned. However, an effective AP has the capacity to move the teaching and learning improvement agenda forward, until such time as all three (agendas) are fully integrated and working to expectations. This is important given the current

reality that the College is a Government owned institution with an open enrollment policy, which poses the challenge of low proficiency percentages amongst its incoming students. For examples, based on the College- designed and administered placement test, in 2010/2011 the proficiency classifications were very low in reading (36% at level 1, and 11% at level 2), critical thinking (2%), writing (28% at level 1, and 3% at level 2) and mathematics (23% at level 1. 5% at level 2, and 1% at level 3) (**Appendix 1**). Additionally in 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 respectively an average of 53% of incoming students had to take at least one precollege course, and approximately 40% had to take both a pre-college Mathematics and English course

(**Appendix 2**). Moreover, student performance data dating back to the periods 2004/06, 2007/09 and 2010/12 for both the students on the Tuition Assistance Programme, and those who are not on the programme show what appear to be three noteworthy situations:

- a. There exists both negatively and positively skewed bell-shaped scenarios. The data shows the normal bell-shaped curve with the distribution of A's, B's, and C's, which account for approximately 66% of the grades over the period 2004/2012. There is also a bell shaped curve with the distribution of D's, F's and I's, which account for approximately 19% of the grades. Withdrawals account for approximately 15% of the grades (**Appendices 1 & 2**)
- b. The performance differences amongst the two referenced groups is negligible (**Appendices 1 & 2**)
- c. Across the three periods there were consistently high percentages of D's, F's, and I's. In aggregate this distribution accounts for approximately 20% of the student population across the three periods (**Appendices 1 & 2**)

While there is a need to better understand the contextual dimension of the data, it is clear that the College has some serious issue to deal with relative to providing for students with proficiency deficiencies, and relatively high failing grades rate. The College is committed to finding the answers to these challenges with the aid of educational best practice. The work of Benjamin Bloom and others, offer much promise as one of the strategies to use going forward, Bloom (1984) has found that all students can learn for mastery, once instruction is varied to meet the needs of the individual learner, and once students are given the requisite amount of time to learn at their respective rates. Bloom also found that it is necessary to develop the total person (cognitive, affective and psychomotor), since it is in so doing that humans can be at their respective best states of readiness for learning. Given these findings, it appears reasonable and prudent enough to commence work on the College's AP, and ensure that these and other basic best practice-oriented principles are integrated even more effectively into all programmes and courses across the campuses. It is the case that many of the College's lecturers are already integrating many of Bloom's principles into their daily work, and it is also the case that the College has invested in the Certificate In University Teaching and Learning towards the end of optimizing teaching and learning. That is most useful and commendable, and should continue.

This AP is an off-shoot of the Strategic Plan 2013/2018's Priority #1, Objective 7, hence it is designed to be in alignment with that Plan, hence its expiration period of 2018. It is expected

that the AP will be updated and renewed when the current Strategic Plan is being revisited and revised.

2. Relationship Between HLSCC'S Academic Plan and Strategic Plan

It is not uncommon for an institution's strategic plan to be guided by an academic plan, and vice versa. In 2013 the institution's **Strategic Plan 2013/2018 (SP)** was developed, ratified by its Board of Governors, and its implementation commenced. The College's **SP** features a vision, mission, four priorities/goals (*Student Learning and Success, Financial Strength, Strengthen Community Relations and Assist in Nation Building, and Organisational and Management Systems*), each of which is complemented by strategic objectives, implementation strategies, and measures. The **SP** also "*makes provisions for*" the integration of the recommendations and suggestions articulated by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education into the **SP**.

While the Strategic Plan 2013/2018 features four strategic priorities/goals, only the **Student Learning and Success Priority** speaks directly to teaching and learning, the core of the institution's mandate. For strategic reasons it only speaks to teaching and learning in a more general best practice-oriented way. That design made it necessary to create a complementary academic plan that more specifically speaks to best practice orientations in core educational issues such as *educational philosophy, academic specific mission, values, goals, objectives, standards, curriculum, desired student profile and outcomes, and pedagogy, amongst other things*. This is designed to provide college constituents with optimum clarity on what the institution wants to achieve, the parameters by which it expects those things to be achieved, and what it expects of its lecturers and students at the through-put and out-put levels. It is also designed to inform the allocation of resources for teaching and learning, and encourage the development and alignment of other plans (e.g. IT, Facilities, Marketing, etc.) with the institution's educational pursuits. Care *must and will* be taken to ensure that the Academic Plan's vision, mission, philosophy, goals, objectives, and measures are in direct alignment with all provisions of the College's Strategic Plan embedded into which is the College's vision, mission, goals and objectives.

Throughout the relatively short history of the HLSCC, it has trained and placed a large number and range of professionals in the local labour market, which positively impacts virtually all aspects of the community. However, there is more and better to be done in terms of proactively identifying and meeting the community's current and future needs through **research and** ever-improving levels of instructional and learning effectiveness and programme offerings. These things are critical to the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College's realisation of its vision, mission, priorities and objectives. It is expected that the College's AP will add value in these areas as well.