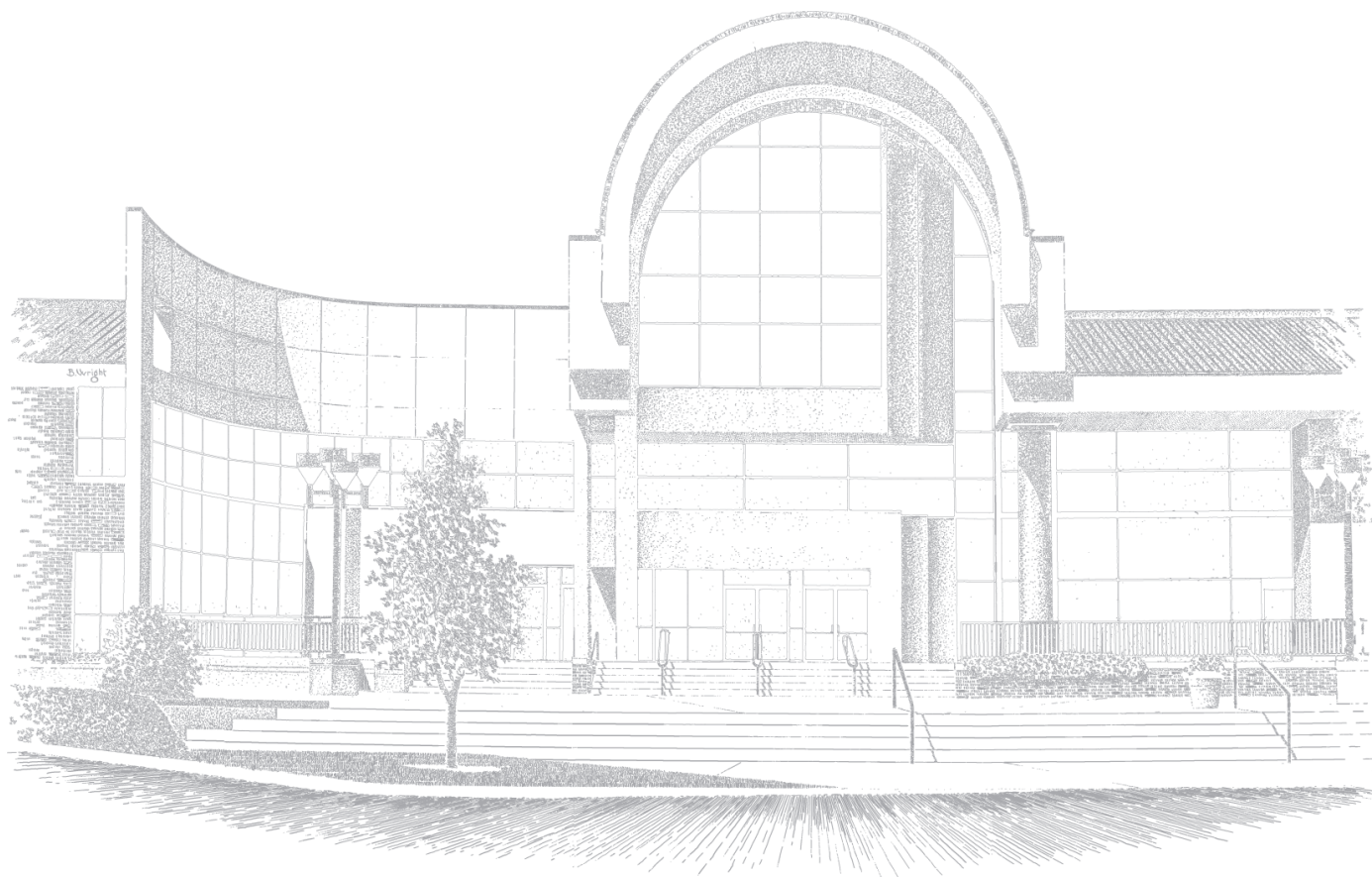


OZARKS TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE



2011 SELF-STUDY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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For continued accreditation with

**THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION OF THE NORTH CENTRAL
ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ozarks Technical Community College (OTC) submits this self-study to receive continued accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The purpose of this report is to enable consultant-evaluators to conduct a comprehensive evaluation that helps OTC further improve its operations. This document also targets key constituencies—including students, faculty, staff, administration, and community members.

Chapter One: Introduction and History

Nine chapters frame the self-study. The first chapter provides an introduction and a history of OTC, while also providing information about major changes and developments since the College's last self-study and comprehensive visit by the HLC. The second chapter describes OTC's self-study process, specifically how the College responded to the accreditation criteria, created self-study goals, and established a committee structure to carry out all duties associated with the self-study process.

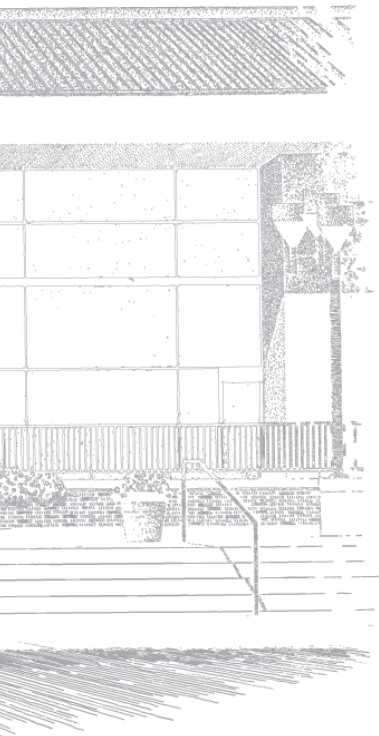
Chapters Three through Seven demonstrate, through evidence and evaluation, how OTC fulfills the HLC criteria for accreditation and specifically address the core components of each criterion. Chapter Eight demonstrates how OTC complies with federal guidelines and mandates. Chapter Nine concludes the self-study with a look to the future.

Chapter Two: The Self-Study Process

The College's pursuit of continued accreditation by HLC and its self-study process allowed OTC to identify its strengths and challenges as it enters a new era of providing workforce training, technical education, allied health, general education, and online teaching and learning to its community. As a College-wide effort, the self-study was an exercise in collaboration, dialogue, and determination. Faculty, staff, administrators, and students—all with a range of experiences and backgrounds—worked together toward a common goal: to improve the institution, the education, and the services it provides to the region. The self-study process allowed the College to evaluate how well it articulates and fulfills its mission and how well it serves diverse stakeholders. Continued affiliation with HLC will position OTC to continue its history of providing excellent programs and services to its constituencies and the surrounding communities.

Chapter Three: Criterion One—Mission and Integrity

The College ensures the fulfillment of its mission to provide affordable, accessible, and quality education. Diversity is one of OTC's core values, and through low tuition, student recruitment, and curricula and programs, the College strives to increase the diversity of its student body. Hiring practices and anti-sexual harassment policies help OTC promote its value of diversity by providing qualified human resources. This chapter has presented evidence that the understanding of and support for the mission is prevalent throughout the institution as demonstrated through instruction, strategic decisions, and review practices that promote quality instruction and the alignment of outcomes with goals.



The governance system that extends from the Board of Trustees through all levels of the institution promotes effective leadership through collaboration and communication, enabling the College to fulfill its mission of operational integrity through appropriate processes. In addition, the College's budgeting process, auditing procedures, and employment practices help maintain and protect integrity.

Strengths identified at OTC associated with Criterion I are as follows:

- The College publicly articulates its mission to both internal and external constituents through multiple venues, both physical and virtual, which promote understanding and support of the mission.
- This chapter provides evidence that faculty, staff, and administration understand and support the mission and mission documents.
- Despite the lack of ethnic and racial diversity of the local population, OTC has developed practices to promote diversity of its employees and students. OTC also recognizes our constituents are diverse in terms of socioeconomic status, academic ability levels, academic background and educational goals.
- Through its governance structures, OTC promotes effective leadership with its collaborative approach to problem solving. This collaborative approach will help the College continue to fulfill its mission to provide affordable, accessible, and quality education while facing continued increases in enrollment.

Challenges identified from this self-study process that are addressed in Criterion I are as follows:

- The self-study process identified the lack of a clear process for strategic planning revisions and implementation of the strategic plan. Actions were taken to redesign the planning process, and through these actions, the Strategic Planning Council was restructured resulting in revisions designed to meet future needs of the College.
- By engaging in the self-study process, the College recognized difficulties associated with the current curriculum procedure and action plans were developed. As a result, the College appointed a Curriculum Taskforce to streamline curriculum development and to ensure proper objective construction and effective assessment plans are developed.
- A challenge identified through this self-study process was the lack of a mechanism to ensure all employees are notified when documentation is placed in their HR personnel file. As a result, an action report has been developed by Human Resources to address the challenge. Initiatives proposed through this action report include creating a policy and procedure for employee notification of disciplinary protocol and provide mandatory supervisor training on employee disciplinary documentation.

Chapter Four: Criterion Two—Preparing for the Future

Since its founding, OTC has demonstrated its ability to prepare for the future by the size and scope of its programs, the state of its facilities and technologies, and the quality and size of its employee base. OTC's student enrollment continues to grow rapidly. The College ranks as the third-largest community college in Missouri and the 17th-largest employer in the Springfield Metropolitan Statistical Area as ranked by The Springfield Data Profile. As further evidence of the College's ability to prepare continuously for the future, *Springfield Business Journal* ranked OTC as the second "most significant change" since 1980 in making a lasting impact on the local economy. This recognition reveals the importance of the College's mission to the community it serves.

OTC has implemented a comprehensive planning process that is dynamic and instrumental to the decision-making and budgeting processes of the College. Planning is based on environmental scanning as well as data from institutional assessment and program evaluation processes. This planning continues to enable OTC to meet the needs of its students and the community it serves. Employees, students, and community stakeholders are engaged in the continued evaluation of OTC, which drives the College's ability to fulfill its mission.

This chapter describes how the College collects, analyzes, and uses data to develop plans and execute necessary changes. Through the development of processes, assessments, and action plans, OTC prepares for the future, supports its educational programs, strengthens program quality, evaluates institutional effectiveness, creates strategies for continuous improvement, and aligns planning processes with the College's mission.

Institutional strengths associated with Criterion 2 are as follows:

- The planning and evaluation processes in place provide evidence of OTC's ability to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. Through these processes, the College allocates the resources needed to move forward.
- OTC has been able to stay financially stable despite reduced state funding. This resilience is a true testament to OTC's ability to plan for the present and the future.
- OTC's Master Plan has helped increase property needed for expansion of the Springfield Campus and added classrooms to the current facilities.
- Funds have been allocated to infill the new Lebanon Education Center, increasing classrooms and technical education facilities to meet the needs of the surrounding community.
- The Master Plan continues to move OTC forward with the development of a new education center in Hollister, Missouri.
- OTC Online enables the College to increase its capacity to serve increasing numbers of students, providing the opportunity to complete a two-year degree or one-year certificate program entirely online.

Institutional challenges associated with Criterion 2 are as follows:

- Based on a recommendation from the HLC evaluation team in 2001, the College has developed strategies and tracked progress for measuring the viability of technical education programs. These actions use a variety of input sources, including advisory committees and employer surveys, to determine whether changes should be made to technical programs.
- With a rapid growth and a decrease in state funding, the College faces challenges to provide instructional space and support necessary to meet growing demands.
- To continue moving forward, efforts are underway to develop a new Master Plan for the Springfield Campus which will involve hiring an architectural firm to assist OTC with development of the plan.
- Historically, OTC has lacked a well-defined and well-communicated strategic planning process. Action plans have been developed to redesign the planning process to ensure an annual evaluation and to make necessary changes and updates.
- Plans have been developed to better connect the strategic plan and the budgeting process to ensure that resources are allocated to support the College mission, vision, and strategic initiatives.

The College understands the growing demands placed on it and is prepared to meet these challenges. Through strong leadership, an active role in governmental relations, the major gifts campaign, and a determination to do much with little, OTC will continue to plan and execute processes that promote success and indicate a commitment to student learning.

Chapter Five: Criterion Three—Student Learning and Effective Teaching

Excellence in teaching and learning is the foundation of all College activities, and this chapter illustrates how OTC's assessment of student learning and teaching effectiveness is ongoing, ensuring OTC's educational quality well into the future. Over the past several years, OTC has focused a college-wide effort to ensure that learning outcomes are measurable in order to make effective assessment possible.

As a result, student learning outcomes are clearly stated and made available to employees in the form of course abstracts, which include a standardized course description, course rationale, course objectives, and content outline. In addition, assessment plans for each course have been incorporated into the curriculum approval process. Assessment data are collected and analyzed in order to enhance instruction, improve student learning, and facilitate the growth and addition of programs and other educational offerings needed by constituents.

OTC curricula are developed by faculty, and curriculum proposals move through several stages of review to ensure the measurability of student learning objectives as well as the feasibility and usefulness of the curriculum. Each department or program is responsible for continually reviewing and refining the courses and programs it offers. The review process is designed to evaluate the validity of courses and programs on a continual basis and to ensure that the objectives are current and measurable.

The College values and supports effective teaching through its professional development requirements and offerings, its public recognition of teaching excellence, as well as its financial support of faculty and staff to pursue continued education and to participate in regional and national conferences.

The College is committed to creating effective teaching and learning environments that advance its educational mission of accessible, affordable, and quality student learning. Similarly, the College utilizes multiple teaching and learning environments to meet the needs of its diverse student body, including state-of-the-art physical facilities, a diverse and dynamic online environment, rich experiential learning, and robust student services.

The College is committed to providing learning resources that support student learning and effective teaching. As OTC has grown and responded to the needs of both its students and other constituents, programs have been developed and offices have been opened to respond in ways that enhance learning and support teaching opportunities. The College's vision is to provide quality learning experiences, and through the resources in place to support student learning and effective teaching, the College is achieving that vision.

Strengths identified at OTC associated with Criterion 3 are as follows:

- The College's Institutional Assessment Plan is a strength, with its emphasis on the support of meaningful student learning outcomes that demonstrate teaching effectiveness. Faculty members at OTC are actively engaged in ensuring student learning outcomes are measurable through the processes of course assessment and curriculum updates and revisions.
- The College diligently works to build a culture of institutional-wide assessment that not only promotes student learning but also evaluates the effectiveness of programs and services offered to constituents.

- The College recognizes teaching excellence, dedicating funds and resources to support excellence in teaching through professional development.
- OTC is committed to providing academic, student, and technology support services to enhance teaching and learning across the institution.
- The College is dedicated to providing additional classroom space through non-traditional course scheduling by implementing block classes, Friday and Saturday classes, and late night classes beginning at or after 10:00 p.m.
- The College provides an alternative to seated classes for students through online and hybrid courses.

Challenges identified from this self-study process that are addressed in Criterion 3 are as follows:

- Effort is underway to better promote awareness and utilization of data generated from various assessment tools to increased numbers of faculty and staff to improve student learning and teaching effectiveness. Even though all assessment data are made available to the OTC community through the Institutional Assessment Report, data other than course assessment results need to be more broadly and explicitly utilized by faculty to guide curriculum and instruction to improve teaching effectiveness and student learning.
- To eliminate the challenge of providing increased human resources for managing and analyzing the Student Satisfaction Survey and the Student Course Evaluation, both have been modified to electronic forms. In addition, the Office of Academic Services, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and the Office of Research and Strategic Planning provide support and management of data and various assessment processes, such as five-year program reviews and course assessment.
- By engaging in the self-study process, the College recognized the difficulties associated with the current curriculum procedure. As a result, action plans were developed and the College appointed a Curriculum Taskforce to streamline curriculum development and to ensure proper objective construction and effective assessment plans are developed.
- A challenge identified is the difficulty associated with finding qualified adjunct instructors for education centers. Additional effort is underway to increase recruitment techniques, provide additional training and orientation for adjunct faculty at education centers, and to more fully utilize the Human Resources department on the Springfield Campus to advertise for open positions at education centers.
- Promoting stronger collaborative efforts between all faculty members, whether full-time or adjunct, at all and between all locations will serve to increase the quality and consistency of the teaching provided at OTC.
- In addition to the time devoted to teaching, faculty members must allocate time to developing curriculum, assessment, promoting course consistency, advising students, and performing other academic activities. To provide the time necessary for accomplishing these tasks, the workload for full-time faculty was reduced from 18 to 15 credit hours in Fall 2007.
- OTC's continuous growth during the past several years, and especially during the economic downturn, is both fortunate and a challenge. During this time of explosive growth, reduction in state funding (FY2009 and FY2010) poses a financial burden on the College. Budgets for travel and professional development outside of the state have seen a reduction.

- The process of offering internal professional development opportunities throughout the academic year was a result of a challenge the College identified due to the lack of adequate space and availability. Professional development sessions are now offered throughout the semester allowing employees to obtain more professional development hours internally.
- A challenge identified by OTC Online was the lack of a procedure that would serve to promote continuous quality improvement to guide the College's online programming. As a result, a pilot began in Spring 2010 to implement a review and evaluation of online course development and delivery.
- The College faces a significant challenge in responding to developmental education needs. In an effort to increase the success and retention rate of students in developmental-level courses and increase the success rate of these students in college-level courses, the College established the Developmental Education Taskforce.
- With increased student growth, the Office of Financial Aid has struggled to keep up with the increased number of financial aid applications and awards. To meet this challenge, the Office of Financial Aid has developed action plans to update its technical resources in order to automate manual processes that increase efficiency and processing time. The College has implemented the OTC SmartCard, which will decrease the amount of time it takes to transfer financial aid payments.
- The Office of Financial Aid reviewed and monitored its processes to develop methods to reduce processing time and to determine what additional staff is required. As a result, human resources were increased from nine to 13 in the Fall 2009 semester to help meet reporting and student needs.
- To serve the increasing number of students more effectively, OTC has incorporated electronic delivery of student information, such as degree audits, online registration, and student email accounts.
- Because of increased utilization of technology in the classroom, procedures for the extent and expectations of usage were developed. OTC faculty are encouraged to implement technology into the classroom whether it is a seated, hybrid, or online course. These expectations of computer usage are made clear in each course syllabus.

Chapter Six: Criterion Four—Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge

OTC promotes a life of learning through scholarship opportunities for students, support of continued education for its employees, professional development, Leadership OTC, and support for Community Enrichment. OTC's philosophy of general education supports the need for core learning experiences that span all academic degrees. This breadth of knowledge is of value to all students regardless of field of study. The College actively promotes the development of articulation agreements, allowing students to transfer to four-year institutions for the purpose of obtaining a four-year degree.

OTC provides learning-centered opportunities through internships, practicum experience, lab simulations, inquiry projects, and work within the community. It is a priority for the College to evaluate program curriculum in order to ensure it remains relevant and viable. In addition, OTC prepares students for a global and technological society through its curriculum, study abroad opportunities, and use of technology in the classroom. Students must understand that the knowledge they have acquired must be used as a resource that serves not only themselves but also the community and society in which they live.

As evidenced in this chapter, OTC believes in these ideals and demonstrates its commitment to them in its procedural documents and in the actions of its Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

The College nurtures a life of learning, not only for its students and community but also for its faculty and employees. OTC goes beyond imparting information to developing learning that challenges students to apply their knowledge to real and complex situations. The College makes sure that experiences and information are available that will prepare students for a much larger world experience than is available in the confines of their communities.

Strengths identified at Ozarks Technical Community College associated with Criterion 4 are as follows:

- Policies and procedures are in place to support the educational and professional growth of the College faculty and staff. This provides students and the community with a model for valuing continuous education and enrichment.
- The College has created a state-of-the-art technological climate for learning and communicated that students must become technically knowledgeable to be successful at the College and in the workplace.
- The College strives to instill in its faculty, staff, and students a strong sense of responsibility to use their skills and talents to improve the service area and to help those in need. In this way, the College sets an example that leads its students into a life of community involvement.
- The continuous evaluation of offerings and responsiveness to constituents assures that the available programs will remain a valuable asset to the community.
- The College seeks to expose learners to diversity and technology and a sense of the global nature of the workplace.

Challenges identified from this self-study process that are addressed in Criterion 4 are as follows:

- With establishment of the Honors Program a challenge exists in the need to recruit a greater number of students into the program. Another challenge is to design specific criteria for honors classes and to have faculty submit course proposals to the Honors Council for approval.
- A challenge identified and addressed was the establishment of criteria to be used as quality indicators in order to evaluate programs and eliminate programs that are no longer a viable option for students.
- To respond to a recommendation given by the HLC 2001 site-visit, OTC has created a webpage exclusively to articulation and transfer agreements to meet the needs of students.

Chapter Seven: Criterion Five—Engagement and Service

Engagement and service are integral to OTC as evidenced throughout its current mission, vision, and core values. In its commitment to the community, the College actively seeks communication, collaboration, and partnerships from its diverse constituents when identifying needs, determining the connection between needs and mission, and assessing its physical, financial, and human resource capacity to meet those needs. With its open-door policy, OTC can and does serve constituents that are distinct in needs, location, age, and socioeconomic status.

The College identifies its primary constituents as the citizens of southwest Missouri. These citizens include diverse external constituencies from the general community, the economic development community, the business and industry community, and the educational partners from both secondary and postsecondary institutions. Internal constituencies comprise a diverse group of students, faculty, staff, and administrators as well as targeted populations of learners—such as first-generation college students, students unprepared for college-level courses, non-English-speaking students, and students requiring special accommodations.

The College mission documents shape the commitments made to its diverse internal and external constituents and aid in the determination of capacity to support those commitments. Strong evidence exists that the College listens, learns from, and responds to the varied needs of its community through numerous programs and services that provide means to a mutually beneficial end. OTC places a high value on collaborative ventures that prove responsive to the needs of the communities that depend on it for service. Through various methods of evaluation, the College provides value to all who benefit from its existence as the community's college.

Institutional strengths associated with Criterion 5 are as follows:

- OTC has demonstrated its willingness and ability to meet the needs of its external community by determining what is desired and needed and providing the necessary services and programs.
- OTC has demonstrated its willingness and ability to meet the needs of its internal community through enrichment programs, professional development, and student organizations.
- OTC has demonstrated a commitment to provide educational opportunities to students transferring to complete bachelor degrees.
- OTC has demonstrated the value placed on the College by employers, community members, students, and employees.

Institutional challenges associated with Criterion 5 are as follows:

- Limited revenues present a challenge to the expansion of College operations. Financial resources are used wisely but are limited, primarily due to decreases in state funding as well as the College's low tax rate. While OTC is the fastest-growing community college in the state of Missouri, it operates on the lowest tax-levy rate.
- Position descriptions need to be evaluated and updated annually and posted to the OTC website, enabling employees to understand different roles within the organization and to conduct proper performance evaluations based on that information.
- Strategies have been developed to increase academic and student support services at the education centers. With the large increases in student enrollment at all of the centers, it is imperative to ensure that steps are taken to provide equitable academic and student support services at these locations.
- The College has formalized articulation agreements and made them accessible to students online to enhance the College's position as an equal partner among higher education institutions.
- An ongoing challenge is the lack of physical space. This challenge is being addressed to the extent financial resources are available, and it is part of the College's ongoing efforts to expand. As OTC reached enrollment levels near 14,000 students in Fall 2010, space was at a premium. With this level of increase, space continues to be a challenge. Additional space at the Lebanon Education Center and what will be the Hollister Education Center will provide much-needed facility relief.

Chapter Eight: Federal Compliance

Federal Compliance directly addresses the College's institutional compliance with federal mandates in support of the Higher Learning Commission's status as an approved accrediting agency. College credits, program lengths, tuition, and transfer information are recorded and identified by the College. In addition, the College complies with federal reporting and eligibility requirements to receive and distribute federal financial aid to students. With this responsibility, accurate records reflect financial aid default rates, and the College's efforts and strategies to educate students in default prevention strategies.

The College adheres to rules and regulations governing financial responsibility as well as the disclosure of campus crime information and consumer information for students. Included in this is the role the College takes to record and track student complaints. Reporting academic progress and publishing attendance policies are other ways the College complies with federal mandates; additional ways include the verification of student identity in online and distance learning courses through proctoring requirements. In addition to HLC regional accreditation, College programs maintain national and professional accreditations. These practices and others verify the College's dedication to the role of maintaining federal compliance in its operations.

Chapter Nine: A Look to the Future and Request for Continued Accreditation

Ozarks Technical Community College demonstrates and has documented that it fulfills the criteria for continued accreditation. The College presents evidence throughout the self-study report that it lives its mission, effectively plans for the future, values student learning and effective teaching, promotes a life of learning, and serves its constituents.

The self-study process has provided the College with an opportunity for evaluation and assessment. The process itself provided many members of the College and community opportunities for collaboration and communication. This process has been a valuable and productive undertaking for the College as it reflects on its accomplishments as well as its challenges.

With this evidence gathered to support its request, OTC respectfully asks that it be granted continued accreditation as it prepares not only to look to its future but also to transition to the Open Pathways accreditation process during the 2012-2013 academic year.

OZARKS TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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BRANSON EDUCATION CENTER • LEBANON EDUCATION CENTER

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