

Year One Peer-Evaluation Report

**Washington State University
Pullman, WA**

May 2011

***A confidential report of findings prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges
and Universities***

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Roster of Evaluators

Chair: Dr. Michael Bowers, Executive Vice President & Provost
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Dr. Stephen Adkison, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
Eastern Oregon University

Ms. Megan Carlson, Academic Project Specialist
University of Alaska Anchorage

Introduction

In March 2010, member institutions of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities were notified that the changes to the accreditation standards and cycle had been accepted. At that time, Washington State University was informed that their seven-year cycle would begin with a Year One Report in Spring 2011. This report was submitted by the institution in March 2011, and reviewed by a panel of three evaluators in March and April of that year.

Assessment of the Institution's Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The institution's evaluation report and supporting materials did an admirable job of summarizing the mission as a research-oriented land-grant institution serving students through four campuses, distance education, and extension offices. The institution is faced with challenges in meeting its mission in a fiscal environment that includes 25.8% cuts in the current biennium, with a similar reduction proposed for the next. The new accreditation standards and process may help to facilitate the institution's decision-making, focusing resources and capacity on the mission priorities.

In addition to addressing the relevant portions of the Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards, the institution also detailed changes made since the last report to increase its efficiency and effectiveness. Of particular note are efforts to modernize the institution's enterprise information management system, institutionalize and improve educational assessment, and engage internal and external communities in the participatory process of institutional changes (including program prioritization and General Education revisions).

Eligibility Requirements Two and Three

The institution is authorized by state statute, addressing Eligibility Requirement Two (Authority). Eligibility Requirement Three pertains to the Mission and Core Themes, which were both approved by the Board of Regents in 2008. The mission and Core Themes are addressed in greater detail in the Standard One findings section which follows.

Section One: Standard One Findings

Standard 1.A.1 Mission

The institution has presented its mission through a vision, mission statement, and values. The mission statement and strategic plan were updated with wide participation from the WSU community and approved by the Board in 2008. The areas of the mission focused on in the institution's self-evaluation include research, degree offerings from baccalaureate through doctoral levels, and less formalized education programs for students served throughout the state. The essential elements of the mission are translated into Core Themes, discussed under item 1.B below.

Standard 1.A.2 Mission Fulfillment

Mission fulfillment is defined through two different categories. The first, "basic mission fulfillment," is related to "maintaining standards of quality and levels of productivity." Targets are established for indicators within a range. If the indicator performance falls outside of that range, basic mission fulfillment is endangered.

Beyond this crucial performance level, the institution has established "aspirational targets;" success with these targets would demonstrate the institution is achieving its higher goals as a leader among its peer research institutions.

The institution commits to the basic mission and strategic plan in the face of budgetary challenges, and uses these priorities "to focus on the critical functions of the university throughout the state."

The institution is commended for establishing two levels of mission fulfillment, reflecting both a commitment to maintaining mission-critical levels of achievement and to moving forward toward its aspirational goals. However, the articulation of mission fulfillment is somewhat unclear.

As the institution begins its revisions for the next report, it should clarify the relationship between the core theme indicators and mission fulfillment. In particular, the distinction between the role of primary and secondary indicators is unclear, as is the question of whether all primary indicators (or both primary and secondary) roll into the definition of mission fulfillment or just a subset of "key indicators."

Standard 1.B Core Themes

The essential elements of the mission are translated into Core Themes focusing on (1) innovation, discovery, and creativity, (2) an educational experience that prepares students to excel in a global society, (3) outreach and engagement both locally and at the national and global levels, and (4) diversity, integrity, and transparency.

The rationale for these core themes as the primary components of the institution's mission is well developed within the discussion of each Core Theme. As an example, the first core theme narrative notes that strategic planning exercises have demonstrated "the degree to which success in its entire mission relies on its strength in innovation, discovery, and creativity." Each Core Theme's rationale builds on the success of the one before it.

Standard 1.B.2 Core Theme Objectives and Indicators

The four essential components of the mission make up the Core Themes. These Core Themes are further developed into 15 objectives, with a total of approximately 86 indicators used to measure these objectives (35 primary indicators, 51 secondary)¹. Examples are provided for each objective to clarify the intent of the Core Theme.

Taken as a whole, the objectives are appropriate to the Core Themes as described. The indicators represent a mix of inputs (e.g. library expenditures per student FTE) and outputs (e.g. sponsored research dollars awarded), and of both quantitative (e.g. freshman retention rate) and qualitative (e.g. institution-wide climate survey) measures.

While the suite of indicators is generally quite thorough, it appears that the indicators do not currently include any that directly reflect student learning outcomes. Considerable work has been invested in systematizing and institutionalizing program assessment, including establishing shared outcomes for the baccalaureate program and for graduate programs. *The institution is encouraged to incorporate student learning outcomes data into the evaluation of both Core Theme achievement and overall Mission Fulfillment.*

The variety of indicators may prove difficult for the institution to manage with regard to data collection, analysis, and synthesis to support decision making. *The committee encourages the institution to continue refining objectives, outcomes, and indicators to focus on those that will provide the most useful information in making resource and capacity decisions.*

¹ Since some indicators are used in more than one objective, the grand total of indicators may be slightly smaller. This may be outweighed by several indicators that are made up of multiple sub-indicators, such as the indicator listing major recognitions for tenured/tenure eligible faculty including several types of recognition.

Summary

Overall, Washington State University has placed itself in strong position to succeed in this seven-year process evaluating its mission fulfillment and directing resources at its critical priorities. *The committee commends the institution for the efforts it has undertaken to embrace recommendations to systematize assessment and engage its internal and external communities in decision-making.* These changes will support the ease and effectiveness of the next steps in the seven-year accreditation reporting process.

Commendation One: The committee commends the institution for the efforts it has undertaken to embrace recommendations to systematize assessment and engage its internal and external communities in decision-making.

Commendation Two: The institution is commended for establishing two levels of mission fulfillment, reflecting both a commitment to maintaining mission-critical levels of achievement and to moving forward toward its aspirational goals.

Recommendation One: The committee encourages the institution to continue refining objectives, outcomes, and indicators to focus on those that will provide the most useful information in making resource and capacity decisions. (Standard 1.B.2)

Recommendation Two: The institution is encouraged to incorporate student learning outcomes data into the evaluation of both Core Theme achievement and overall Mission Fulfillment. (Standard 1.B.2)

Recommendation Three: As the institution begins its revisions for the next report, it should clarify the relationship between the core theme indicators and mission fulfillment. In particular, the distinction between the role of primary and secondary indicators is unclear, as is the question of whether all primary indicators (or both primary and secondary) roll into the definition of mission fulfillment or just a subset of "key indicators." (Standard 1.A.2, 1.B.2)