

Year Three Peer-Evaluation Report

**Washington State University**

**Spring 2013**

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

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## **II. Introduction**

Founded in 1890, Washington State University (WSU) serves about 27,000 students (24,810 FTE; 21,100 undergraduate, 2881 graduate, and 829 professional) at campuses in Pullman, Spokane, Vancouver, and the Tri-cities (Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland) with a student to faculty ratio of about 15 to 1. In addition to a broad range of undergraduate programs, WSU offers 66 master's degree programs and 47 doctoral degree programs. Professional education is offered in veterinary medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and education. Extended educational access is provided through the Global Campus and WSU Extension. Key attributes of WSU are its focus on research and creative activity, its land-grant mission, and its intent to be invited to join the Association of American Universities (AAU).

Dr. Elson S. Floyd has served as WSU's president for almost six years after serving four year terms as president of two other major universities. WSU Board of Regents' members, appointed by the governor, have six year terms of service, except for the student regent; four regular members are currently serving second terms. The chancellors at the Spokane, Vancouver, and Tri-cities campuses are all relatively new; Lisa Brown became chancellor of the Spokane campus in January 2013, Mel Netzhammer became the Vancouver campus chancellor in July 2012, and H. Keith Moo-Young will take over as chancellor of the Tri-cities campus effective June 1, 2013. James R. (Dick) Pratt, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the Tri-cities campus, currently serves as Interim Chancellor. A new Provost will come on board during summer 2013. In 2010 WSU's organizational structure was significantly changed as a result of the economic downturn and the resulting reduction of state funding; the number of vice presidents was reduced from nine to six that year, largely through mergers of units.

Institutional accreditation was last reaffirmed by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) in 2011 based on a peer-evaluation of a year-one report. Three NWCCU recommendations

resulted from the year-one report. In addition, WSU had two continuing recommendations in response to the 2009 Comprehensive Evaluation Report, with further information requested following the 2010 Progress Report. These five recommendations and progress to date are addressed in section IV (Topics Addressed as an Addendum to the Self-Evaluation Report) below.

The 2008 economic downturn had a significant impact on WSU; the university lost \$231 million in net state appropriations (52% of their appropriations). However, its total operating budget actually increased –to more than \$1.6 billion between 2007 and 2011 as a result of a 43 percent increase in research expenditures, a 52 percent increase in philanthropic gifts, and resident undergraduate and graduate tuition rate increases of 81 and 55 percent, respectively. Significant layoffs and administrative restructuring were implemented as cost savings measures during this period. The scale of change this institution has accomplished in the past five years is staggering.

### **III. Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report & Support Materials**

The WSU self-evaluation process was coordinated by a broadly representative committee of seven comprising the WSU Accreditation, Assessment, and Academic Program Review Committee. Sixty-four individuals were identified as contributing to the Self-Evaluation Report.

The self-evaluation report provides a brief institutional overview and update of institutional changes since the May 2011 year one report. Individual chapters address the elements of the accreditation standards and eligibility requirements. Revisions made in response to continuing topics requested by the commission, year-one recommendations, and the mission and core themes (strategic goals) were well articulated.

The Peer-Evaluation Committee found that the quality of the report represented the quality of the institution well. The report illustrated clear reflection on whether the institution's resource and capacity are sufficient to fulfill its core themes. The supplementary information, e.g., institutional policies, leadership qualifications, examples of communication, and outcomes assessment documentation by program, in the form of electronic files were well prepared and useful.

A few improvements to the self-evaluation report that could be addressed when preparing the Year Seven Report were identified. Acronyms were sometimes used prior to their definition, e.g., CAHNRS on page 17 and CLA on page 91. References to the seven goals of the baccalaureate and references to the 6 essential elements of outcomes assessment were made before they were explained. The sufficiency of staff was difficult to assess because the report did not give staff numbers by function, e.g., advising or admissions. However, as noted above, these are minor improvements to an otherwise well prepared report.

The self-evaluation report content was verified by examining WSU's catalog, the electronic exhibits, and conducting interviews with key administrators and faculty, staff, and student leadership. WSU provided evaluator login access to their intranet for examination of student learning outcomes information. Institutional websites, the catalog, and documents made available as exhibits, including program reviews, general education foundation documents, and Board of Regents minutes, were examined. WSU provided

evaluators with a flash drive containing the Basic Institutional Data Form, a guide to accessing information at WSU, a link to the class schedule, the catalog, and the Self-Evaluation Report.

#### **IV. Topics Addressed as an Addendum to the Self-Evaluation Report**

WSU received the following recommendations in response to the spring 2009 Comprehensive Evaluation Report, with further information requested following the 2010 Progress Report (note that the standard citations refer to a previous set of standards):

*Comprehensive Evaluation Recommendation 2: Implementation of the educational assessment plan remains inconsistent across the University, despite promising starts and a number of exemplary successes in selected programs. The Commission recommends that the University continue to enhance and strengthen its assessment process. This process needs to be extended to all of the University's educational programs, including graduate programs, and programs offered at the branch campuses (Standard 2.B).*

Progress: WSU attached a substantial addendum to the Year-Three Self-Evaluation Report that clearly reported and assessed its performance and development in outcomes assessment across all educational programs including graduate programs and programs offered at branch campuses. WSU has demonstrated significant progress in implementing assessment processes during the past two years. A change in leadership for assessment in January 2011 and a service oriented collaborative approach to implementation of assessment created the needed change at WSU that led to this significant progress. Assessment processes include the laudable documented use of assessment information in college and school planning and institutional planning. It is clear that the WSU is taking outcomes assessment seriously and that leadership in this area has resulted in meaningful implementation. The Peer Evaluation Committee concluded that WSU has continued to enhance and strengthen its assessment processes including extension to graduate programs and branch campuses so this recommendation has been satisfied.

While WSU has made significant strides in implementing outcomes assessment processes, interviews confirmed that these processes are not yet as fully developed or as effective as they need to be; assessment implementation is still maturing at WSU. One sign of a lack maturity in assessment is that many programs have only implemented a single assessment cycle. Another sign, given in the Year-Three Self-Evaluation Report (page 223), is that for undergraduate programs “65 percent of programs report that their faculty discuss results of assessment” so faculty with teaching responsibilities in academic programs commonly (35% of programs) do not take collective responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes (2.C.5). Evaluators were also told that while assessment information is collected from the extended campuses, faculty at those sites are in many cases not included in the review of the aggregate student outcomes summary or in discussions about the use of that information. Additionally, the Self-Evaluation report does not discuss whether academic programs are including information learning outcomes information for students taking programs or courses online through the Global Campus in their assessment processes; interviews suggested this information was undocumented and unknown. The Peer Evaluation Committee concluded that while significant progress in outcomes assessment implementation has been achieved, not all programs have fully achieved the level of implementation expected and not all instructional faculty are engaged in these processes. The Peer

Evaluation includes a recommendation in the summary to address the continuing need for progress in this area.

*Recommendation 3: Washington State University has embarked upon an aggressive strategy of institutional transformation and change. This is reflected, for example, in a significantly greater emphasis on research and graduate education, a restructured general education program, a comprehensive review that is leading to the elimination and/or enhancement of academic programs, and the creation of a new University College. In this context of substantive change, the Commission recommends that the University administration and its governing board pay particular attention to expectations that the process be participatory, respecting the views of all stakeholder groups in matters where they have direct and reasonable interest in order to sustain a structure that ensures the long-term stability and integrity of the institution (Standards 1.B.3, 6.A.3).*

Progress: WSU provided an addendum on communication in response to this recommendation documenting regular meetings of the president and provost with various faculty, staff, student, and other constituent groups, public addresses and forums, and communication to university-wide and targeted audiences. Two student governance leaders indicated that student representation on the tuition setting committee, the President’s student advisory committee, and more consistent communication from the student regent had significantly improved the students’ participation and voice in institutional decision making. Interviews of branch campus personnel indicated participation in the open and web-based forums. Budget cuts and tuition conversations have necessarily dominated much of the stakeholder engagement during the past few years. Based on the documentation provided and the interviews with student governance leaders, the Peer-Evaluation Committee concluded that the communication processes now in place at WSU are sufficient to satisfy this recommendation.

The 2011 year-one peer-evaluation committee made three recommendations. Each recommendation is listed below followed by a discussion of progress for each and the year three Peer-Evaluation Committee’s perspective on whether each recommendation has been satisfied or not:

*Year-One Recommendation 1: 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)*

Progress: WSU adopted its four strategic goals as its core themes. Three to five objectives are identified for each strategic goal and indicators of achievement have been identified for each objective. The number of indicators has been reduced from 86 to 40 from the year-one report to the year-three report so WSU has made substantial progress in reducing the number of indicators to the ones they find most useful for making resource and capacity decisions. Some minor refinement remains to be addressed on better connecting objectives to indicators. For example, one objective is “Attract and retain a diverse faculty and staff of the highest academic stature.” The related indicators are the number of national academy members, the number of faculty awards, the number of publications/juried or adjudicated shows, citations—H index, and sponsored research dollars awarded and expended. The rationale for these indicators speaks only to faculty excellence and does not address diversity or staff excellence. However, the vast majority of indicators are well aligned with the objectives. The Peer-Evaluation Committee concluded that the changes made by WSU were sufficient to satisfy this recommendation.

Year-One Recommendation 2: *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)*

Progress: WSU has added four new indicators of achievement related to outcomes assessment; percent of undergraduate programs with all six program assessment elements (see below) of student learning in place, percent of graduate programs using student learning assessment results in decision making, percent of colleges and campuses using student learning outcomes assessment results in strategic planning and decision making, and evidence that university-level decision making is informed by student learning assessment results. The six program assessment elements are establishment of student learning outcomes, assessment plan, curriculum map, one or more direct measures, one or more indirect measures, and using assessment results. The addendum on educational outcomes assessment summarizes how the institution has performed with respect to these indicators so there is evidence of implementation. . These four new assessment indicators are used to evaluate the strategic goals (core themes) but none of these indicators are in the mission-essential indicators used to assess mission fulfillment. The Peer-Evaluation Committee concluded that the changes made by WSU were not sufficient to satisfy this recommendation.

Year-One Recommendation 3: *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)*

Progress: WSU significantly revised and reorganized its collection of 86 primary and secondary indicators to a collection of 40 indicators of achievement identified in 4 overlapping categories; 12 mission-essential indicators, 18 Regents’ key (aspirational) indicators, 16 state performance indicators, and 31 strategic plan/diagnostic indicators. WSU specifies that “A downward trend in any of the 12 mission-essential indicators may be a sign that WSU is not fulfilling its mission and signals the need for closer investigation and an institution-wide plan to improve performance in the area measured by that indicator.” It is clear that this mission-essential subset of indicators defines mission fulfillment. The Peer-Evaluation Committee concluded that the changes made by WSU were sufficient to satisfy this recommendation.

## **V. Eligibility Requirements**

At the beginning of each chapter of the self-evaluation report, there is appropriate text that relates to particular eligibility requirements associated with that chapter. Consequently, the document as a whole, and as verified through on-site discussions, appears to demonstrate that Washington State University meets all of the provisions of the Commission’s Eligibility Requirements for Accredited Higher Education Institutions. Of special note is that the core themes (2008-2013 Strategic Plan goals) were approved by the Board of Regents August 29, 2008 (ER 3).

## **VI. Mission, Core Themes and Expectations**

### Standard 1.A Mission

The current mission statement for Washington State University was adopted by its Board of Regents in 2008. WSU's mission identifies three distinct components; to advance knowledge through creative research and scholarship, to extend knowledge through innovative educational programs, and to apply knowledge through local and global engagement. This mission appears to be well understood by all of the institution's major constituencies and it provides a clear foundation for strategic planning and management activities.

### Standard 1.B Core Themes

WSU has adopted the following four goals of its 2008-13 strategic plan as its core themes:

- Innovation, Discovery, and Creativity: Achieve national and international preeminence in innovation, discovery, and creativity.
- Premier Education and Transformative Student Experience: Provide a premier education and transformative experience that prepares students to excel in a global society.
- Outreach and Engagement: Lead in relevant local, national, and global outreach and engagement.
- Diversity, Integrity, and Transparency: Embrace an environment of diversity, integrity, and transparency.

Objectives, established for each core theme, are meaningful and have verifiable indicators of achievement. Forty indicators of achievement have been classified into four overlapping categories; mission-essential Indicators, regents' key (aspirational) indicators, state performance indicators, and strategic plan/diagnostic indicators. A downward trend in any of the 12 mission-essential indicators indicates that WSU may not be fulfilling its mission (Standard 1.A.2).

Recommendation 2 of the Year-One Evaluation stated "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)." The Year-Three Peer Evaluation Committee concluded that while four new indicators summarizing outcomes assessment information are now being used to assess objectives, none are mission-essential indicators used assessment of mission fulfillment. Thus, the Committee concluded that this recommendation has not been sufficiently fulfilled and a recommendation is included in the summary.

The Peer Evaluation Committee encourages WSU to clearly identify the mission-essential indicator trend statement as the required threshold or extent of mission fulfillment statement in preparing their year seven report because other groups of indicators were identified as "mission-specific" or "diagnostic with respect to mission fulfillment." As a result of uncertainty in interpreting the Self-Evaluation Report in this regard, the Peer Evaluation Committee sought and received confirmation from WSU that this mission-essential indicator trend statement was indeed the intended threshold statement.



## **VII. Resources and Capacity**

### Standard 2.A Governance

WSU has a ten-member Board of Regents appointed by the governor including one student member. The Board provides general direction and oversight for the university and has a well-established set of bylaws identifying its organizational structure and operating policies and procedures. It clearly acts as a whole rather than on an individual or committee basis. Actions of the executive committee between board meetings are submitted for ratification by the entire board. It effectively exercises its legal authority and is stable in membership. The responsibilities and relationships among and between the Board and the President are well-defined and well-understood by university constituencies. Minutes of the Board of Regents reflect broad trust in the WSU president to plan, administer and manage the institution. In addition, the minutes indicate that the Board evaluated its own performance in January 2012.

As a multi-campus system, WSU has a complex but well-understood division of authority and responsibility. For example, the Spokane campus is considered a collocated extension of the Pullman campus so the academic units at Pullman have full authority over faculty at Spokane. However, the Vancouver and Tri-cities campuses have shared authority with the Pullman campus for their programs. WSU is very proud that all their graduates regardless of the campus on which they complete their programs have earned a WSU degree, not a WSU-Vancouver or a WSU Tri-cities degree.

The university is led by President Elson S. Floyd who is well qualified to manage the overall operation of the university; he has substantial previous experience as a president of two other major universities. The president is designated by Washington State law as Secretary Ex Officio of the board of regents but is not a voting member of the Board. The Board of Regents evaluates the president annually using a well-established process of self-assessment, written comments from individual board members to the president, and then a conversation between the board chair and the president. Management is delegated to the vice presidents and extended campus chancellors.

WSU has a president, a Provost and Executive Vice President, Vice Presidents for Business and Finance, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, Agriculture and Extension, Information Services and Chief Information Officer, Global Campus, chancellors at each of the extended campuses, and supporting vice provosts, associate vice presidents, and deans and directors. While budget cuts in the past several years resulted in a reduction of administration and merging of units, the Peer-Evaluation Committee concluded that the institution employs a sufficient number of qualified administrators to support fulfillment of WSU's mission and its strategic plan goals (core themes).

The institution generally monitors its compliance with the Commission's Standards for Accreditation (Standard 2.A.3). However, one exception is noted. The Self-Evaluation Report (page 94) indicates that one collective bargaining agreement for a union representing 280 employees, has an article (#6) that prohibits performance evaluations. Regular performance evaluations for administrators and staff are required by Standard 2.B.2. Because a performance evaluation is an expectation and reality for the vast majority of WSU's employees, the institution is substantially in compliance. However, the Peer Evaluation Committee includes a Concern at the end of this section with regard to Standards 2.A.3 and

2.B.2 because of this discrepancy. Additional discussion of this issue is addressed in the 2.B section below.

WSU's governance is a consultative process that significantly engages faculty, staff and students in university-level decision making. Broadly representative committees are effective mechanisms in providing review and advice at the institutional level. The open budget forums, the Tuition Setting Committee, and the President's Student Advisory Council are examples of a consultative process.

WSU has a well-established and well-communicated set of policies and procedures related to teaching, research, and service, admissions, transfer of credit, credit for prior learning, student rights and responsibilities, library and information resource access, academic freedom, conflict of interest, and intellectual property. Based on interviews conducted by the Peer-Evaluation Committee, these policies and procedures appear to be generally followed and appeal processes exist. The Committee found evidence that several policies had been revised in the past few years based on shared governance input.

CONCERN: WSU has one collective bargaining agreement that does not allow performance evaluations. This agreement appears in violation of 2.B.2 and so represents a lack of attention of the institution to monitor its compliance with Commission Standards for Accreditation (2.A.3).

#### Standard 2.B Human Resources

WSU suffered major legislative budget cuts over the last four years which have impacted the entire university. Before the cuts, the university had approximately 4,000 positions. A major strategy for balancing the budget included laying off 248 employees, including 27 tenure track faculty members, as well as eliminating an additional 333 vacant positions. These reductions were very difficult, but they also provided the university with the opportunity to find new efficiencies and repurpose resources. The university has adapted to the new staffing levels and seems well-positioned to continue to deliver its mission effectively and efficiently.

Some anecdotal evidence was found, such as long lines in student services, that suggest that not every area is fully recovered or adjusted. But those situations are the exception rather than the rule. No critical positions have been left vacant.

The university has managed the changes in a manner that has prevented the remaining positions from being unreasonably weighed down with additional duties absorbed from the eliminated positions. The Human Resources office has completed desk audits where necessary, and has found that positions are not overwhelmed. If anything, positions are now utilized more fully and efficiently than they had been previously. Again, the cuts, though devastating in many regards, provided the university with an opportunity to improve for the long run.

WSU has taken measures to insure that evaluations are a part of the institutional culture at the university. The Provost has supported the evaluation process for both faculty and administrators. Faculty members expect regular reviews. Moreover, the policies and procedures for the university require annual evaluations for all administrative staff as well as the civil service employees at the university. Regarding evaluations, the accreditation standards state, "Administrators and staff are evaluated regularly with regard to performance of work duties and responsibilities." While there is ample evidence that the university requires this, the technology systems have no way of producing a report that shows how many

employees actually are evaluated regularly. The Human Resources office receives hard copies of the evaluations and maintains those copies in the employee files, but no data is maintained that provides evidence the evaluations are consistently and uniformly being completed. This is something the university should rectify.

The university provided information about a group of 280 employees who are represented by the Washington Federation of State Employees. These employees are spread across campus in a variety of units. The employees negotiated a collective bargaining agreement with the university. That agreement includes a provision which states, "There will be no formal, written performance appraisals." The language is not compatible with the accreditation standard related to evaluations as referenced above. This contradiction should be resolved by the university in the future. Despite this language the university believes that the agreement does not inhibit supervisors' abilities to address performance-related or other concerns for these employees, and is not a problem for the university overall. This is a unique phenomenon and WSU is in substantial compliance with the accreditation standard. However, see the Concern noted at the end of the Standard 2.A Governance section above.

During the time of the budget cuts, the university trimmed many budget items. Travel and professional development were curtailed. Over the last year or two those restrictions have softened, so employees are able to avail themselves of development opportunities outside of the university. A very positive measure the university took during the cuts was to protect sabbatical leaves. Sabbatical leaves were not eliminated during the cuts. Faculty members were allowed to apply for and continue sabbaticals. This decision helped soften the negative impacts to morale during the difficult cuts. The university continues to offer many resources to staff and faculty for development. The Human Resources office provides training in areas such as supervisory training, new employee orientation and sexual harassment training. Interviews of personnel at the extended campuses indicated that both in-person and web-based professional development and training opportunities were being utilized at those locations. In addition, the H.R. office bolsters campus offerings by providing training in areas such as safety and communications skills.

One other aspect of training that the university is paying adequate attention to is for new department chairs. Chairs are provided training similar to what staff supervisors receive, only geared more toward faculty issues. They are trained in personnel processes. The training is offered via video feed, so employees can receive it statewide. It is offered every year, and also includes information about budget management and funding structures. Overall, professional development is a part of the culture at the institution and is an ongoing strategy the university uses to improve its employees' performance and skills.

WSU has excellent faculty. The university has more than 900 tenured or tenure-track faculty. The university attracts scholars from all over the world. The impact on faculty was minimized during the cuts. Despite the cuts, student educational progress, as measured by time-to-degree data, has held steady.

The university has also done remarkably well at retaining quality faculty and staff during the past few years. At times this has required counter-offers and other measures to keep employees at WSU. There have been very few raises for any employees. In December 2012, the President provided a 2% one-time payment, which demonstrated a concern for the employees and an appreciation for the excellent job they continue to do.

## Standard 2.C Education Resources

Undergraduate programs appear to be appropriate in content and rigor, and consistent with the institution's mission as a land-grant research university. The degrees of study lead to collegiate-level degrees or certificates with designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.

It is too early to state that all programs "culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes." While all programs now list student learning outcomes, some need significant work, and many programs have much work to do to fully assess student achievement.

WSU has made significant strides in articulating program and degree learning outcomes, including publishing a substantial portion of the learning outcomes in the catalog. However not all are published, and many syllabi published on the campus web pages have yet to include course learning outcomes. The Peer-Evaluators observed a developing assessment culture which appears to be bringing faculty into the assessment process, but at present, faculty involvement is not consistent across departments.

Based on published four-year curriculum plans, the degree programs demonstrate coherent design with appropriate breadth, depth, and sequencing of courses. Credit and degrees are awarded based on documented student achievement following norms in higher education.

Review processes for new courses and programs have significant faculty input and review.

The inclusion of information literacy in the seven goals of the baccalaureate will encourage faculty to continue to work with Library staff. The table of number of hits on several published library guides [Exhibit 2.C.6-3] clearly demonstrates that students are using this information, and being directed there by some faculty members.

The guidelines for awarding credit for prior experiential learning and for the acceptance of transfer credit seem appropriate and follow the norms in higher education.

### Undergraduate Programs

WSU has implemented a new general education program called the University Common Requirements or UCORE. After speaking with faculty and administrators the Peer-Evaluators observed that faculty perceived that changes in the general education program were needed, and the UCORE approach was predominantly faculty driven, although the timing of the implementation was not. The new general education program was designed to map to the Seven Learning Goals, and was designed with assessment in mind. The new UCORE general education program appears to satisfy Standard 2.C.9. The UCORE requirements map to the Institution's Seven Learning Goals which include clear statements of learning outcomes.

### Graduate Programs

Graduate programs at Washington State University are generally characterized as well-defined, well-organized, and rigorous. The breadth of offerings is consistent with the institution's mission.

The graduate programs offered show a greater depth of study than is required for undergraduate programs, are well aligned with their respective disciplines and professions. The guidelines for admission

to the graduate programs and for the acceptance of transfer credit seem appropriate and follow the norms of higher education. The faculty in the disciplines ultimately determines the acceptability of transfer credits. Institution policies on credit for internships, field experiences, and clinical practices follow higher education norms.

WSU clearly articulated the differences between programs preparing students to advance frontiers in research and scholarship, and programs designed to prepare students for artistic creation or professional practice. All doctoral degree programs prepare students for research and scholarship.

#### Continuing Education and Non-Credit Programs

Through the Global Campus, Conference Management, and Extension options, Washington State University provides a wide range of credit- and non-credit educational opportunities which are appropriate to a land-grant university.

Courses offered through the Global Campus must go through the same review processes as on-campus courses. While it appears that students are held to the same academic standard regardless of mode of delivery, it is unclear (both to the Peer-Evaluators and the individuals contacted on campus) whether student work in an online course has the same probability of inclusion in an assessment process as on-campus student work. That is, it is not clear that student outcomes from online courses are included in assessment of student learning outcomes in the same way as on-campus course materials. This should be reviewed during the Year Seven visit.

The granting of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) appears to be guided by generally accepted norms and is consistent with the mission of the institution. Materials provided to the peer-evaluators were inadequate to ascertain whether WSU maintains records which describe the number of courses and nature of learning provided through non-credit instruction. However, a publically available archive of conference events provides good evidence of the nature of non-credit instruction provided.

#### Credit Hour Policy

Washington State University provides a definition of “credit” in an appendix of their 2012 Catalog entitled Academic Regulations (a shorter version also appears near the front of the Catalog on a page entitled Summary of Academic Policies.) The credit definition used by Washington State University is based on time spent in various instructional activities, and conforms to norms of higher education.

27. CREDIT DEFINITION. Academic credit is a measure of the total minimum time commitment required of a typical student in a specific course. For the WSU semester system one semester credit is assigned for a minimum of 45 hours. The expected time commitment may include: 1) time spent in scheduled course activities organized by an instructor (lectures, discussions, workbooks, videotapes, laboratories, studios, fieldwork, etc.); 2) time spent in group activities related to course requirements; and 3) time spent in reading, studying, problem solving, writing, and other preparations for the course. The minimum in-class time commitment, based on a fifteen-week semester and a traditional format, should follow these guidelines: 1) lecture--one hour of lecture per week for each credit hour; 2) laboratory--three hours of laboratory per week for each credit hour; 3) studio--two hours of studio work per week for each credit hour; 4) ensemble--four hours of ensemble work per week for each credit hour. The minimum time

commitment for independent study is three hours of work per week for each credit hour. Courses taught in different time frames than the fifteen-week semester or in a different format need to define how the time commitment leads to the achievement of stated course goals. Achievement of course goals may require more than the minimum time commitment.

## Standard 2.D Student Support Resources

Washington State University approaches its relationships with and education of students using a broad definition of student support and success. Among the University's student access and success efforts are; ensuring access and support for historically-underrepresented students; offering a range of means for participating in educational experiences, including on-line program offerings; and supporting students in their transition into and out of the university. Clearly, student support staff members bring a high level of dedication to their positions.

Because of the dramatic change WSU has experienced in recent years, precipitated by economic challenges, there appears to be diminished academic advising support and other supports for students' educational needs. The lack of staffing support has created particular stress on the resources and capacity of WSU's Registrar's Office.

Policies, procedures and programs are designed to be in alignment with the institution's mission. Campus regulations are widely and clearly communicated in a variety of formats. All campuses have well-developed emergency preparedness systems, including a campus alert system (WSU ALERT) to notify the campus in the event of a range of emergency situations. In addition, a variety of safety trainings are provided to campus community members.

Students are provided with clear and accessible information regarding their rights and responsibilities. Federal crime reporting and related data management is performed as required and statistics are available on the University website and in campus publications.

Washington State University employs a multi-dimensional approach to admissions, basing its criteria on the category into which the applicant's profile fits. Students admitted at various program levels are provided with appropriate support services, in direct response to the unique skills, educational goals and characteristics of the in-coming student. There appears to be a particularly strong support structure for students categorized as at-risk.

New student orientation is mandatory for all first-year students (freshman). Students must also meet with an academic advisor prior to their first term of enrollment. The catalog offers clear information on admissions criteria. Graduation and academic progress standards are published. The Graduate School, the Office of Admissions, and academic departments jointly manage graduate and professional student admissions.

The University has a published policy on the process to consider program elimination and a policy that will enable student completion of program requirements, in the event of program or course elimination. The University's recent history with program elimination provides evidence that the policy is viable and has worked.

WSU makes available in print and on-line for all interested parties information on its mission and core themes, entrance requirement, grading procedures, the academic calendar, faculty and administrator titles and academic qualifications, academic program information and other information pertaining to the cost of attendance, financial aid, and refund policies.

The WSU catalog is published annually and provides students with essential information on policies, procedures, academic program requirements, rights and responsibilities, and course offerings. The catalog provides specific information on professional or degree programs requiring particular credentialing, or certification. Detailed information is provided for each graduate program, identifying licensure requirements and employment opportunities. WSU does a very nice job of providing information on the requirements and opportunities associated with its graduate programs.

WSU has a very detailed policy governing the administration, access to, usage, maintenance and security of student data. University employees are required to complete mandatory FERPA training in order to be certified to have access to student records. Student records are maintained and backed up on secure systems. Students are provided with information regarding institutional policies on the release of records. The university has stringent guidelines on access to and release of student records.

Student financial aid policies are clearly communicated, as is information on types of financial aid provided. Through its on-line calculator, WSU assists students in estimating the cost of attendance. WSU experienced challenges with aid disbursement, because of problems with student information system conversions, in the fall of 2012. Officials developed and implemented a successful communication plan and strategies to mitigate the negative impact on students. The problems associated with the system conversion did not reoccur during spring 2013.

All students receiving and accepting student loans are provided with entrance loan counseling. Any student graduating, terminating their studies or withdrawing from the institution must complete a student loan exit interview. Student loan default rates are regularly monitored and published.

The university's philosophy of academic advising is based on a partnership and shared responsibility between the student and advisor. Academic advising is mandatory for all students on all of its campuses – Vancouver and Tri-Cities employ centralized models, while Pullman and Spokane use a de-centralized approach. The particular designs of advising within units vary based on the program, students served and other factors.

Academic advising staff members across the University have appropriate professional preparation and training and are well qualified to execute the responsibilities of their roles and advance the University's mission. Campus-specific mechanisms are in place to ensure on-going training for advisors and the institution conducts regular surveys to evaluate its advising system.

Page 152 of the Self-Evaluation report noted that "Depending on the college and campus, both faculty and professional staff may be academic advisors with advising loads that range from 15 students (for teaching/research faculty) to more than 750 students (for some full-time advisors); a typical advising load is about 300-350 students for most full-time advisors." WSU is encouraged to examine advisor workloads in light of best practices to ensure that recent budget cuts have not adversely affected the advising needs of each campus.

WSU offers a rich and diverse array of extra-curricular activities for students, including more than 200 clubs and organizations, and the institution is broadly supportive of a dynamic co-curricular experience. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is used to assess co-curricular engagement. The Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment is working with its units to complete the development of co-curricular learning goals.

Auxiliary programs (Housing Services, Dining Services, Residence Life, Compton Union Building, Children's Center, Student Recreation Center, Beasley Coliseum, Parking and Transportation Services, and Cougar Card Center) are closely aligned with the educational and co-curricular programs. Faculty, staff and students have sufficient input on services and programs through advisory boards, user surveys and benchmarking surveys. Auxiliary programs are seen as integral components of efforts to build a strong community; this is most evident in the sustainability and partnership initiatives modeled in the leadership of those programs.

WSU sponsors 17 intercollegiate sports at the Division I level. The Department of Athletics functions consistent with the mission of the institution. Student athletes must meet the same academic admission standards as other students. In cases where athletes do not meet the established admissions standards, a committee to assess students with extraordinary talents reviews applications. The Department of Athletics is administered consistently with institutional policies and procedures and has the necessary administrative oversight to ensure its alignment with institutional mission and values.

The university has a well-established and executed policy for protecting the privacy and verifying the identity of on-line and distance students. On-line students are allowed various options for taking proctored exams in settings that verify a student's identity. Institutional policies that protect student identity, while also ensuring academic integrity, are clearly articulated.

#### Standard 2.E Library and Information Resources

The staff of the Libraries of WSU in Pullman attempt to maintain material collections adequate for research purposes for all programs offering a PhD, and collections intended to support academic purposes in other areas. Recent budget cuts have resulted in the closures of three of six libraries on the Pullman campus, with collections centralized in the remaining buildings, and appear to have reduced budgets for library acquisitions.

The Libraries present a thorough analysis of collection levels on their website. For disciplines in which a PhD is offered, collections at Level B are desired. Level B, the Research Level, is described on the site as

A collection which includes the major published source materials required for dissertations and independent research, including materials containing research reporting, new findings, scientific experimental results, and other information useful to researchers. It also includes all important reference works and a wide selection of specialized monographs, as well as an extensive collection of journals and major indexing and abstracting services in the field.

However, there is also a published caveat:



The actual collecting levels may fall short of the ideal in some years because of inadequacies in the Libraries resources budget.

Data available on the Libraries website indicates that expenditures on collections have been below their identified institutional peers, and have fallen in recent years. Additionally, current collections in STEM disciplines are generally one level below where WSU would like to be (Level C(1) rather than Level B in most cases). The off-site review made it difficult for the peer-evaluators to assess library collections, but we recommend that the Year Seven evaluators address this issue in light of continuing budget reductions.

Planning for library and information resources does appear to be guided by data that includes feedback from users. Based on information supplied in the Exhibits, the libraries appear to be well-used and library staff members are highly involved in instructional support.

The Collection Development Policies indicates a systematic analysis of library resources, and the published responses to the “We Hear You” surveys indicate that the libraries staff are seeking and responding to user needs.

#### Standard 2.F Financial Resources

The recession brought tremendous financial challenges to the university. A 52% reduction in state tax funding amounted to a loss of \$231 million. The university employed several measures to address the cuts, including lay-offs, elimination of vacant positions, strategic enrollment growth measures, and new revenue from tuition increases and external research funding. Through all of this the university had one central theme: to continue operating in the most cost-effective manner possible without compromising the quality of instructional and research programs. The cuts have changed the university. Positions have been combined, duties reassigned, and administrative structures overhauled (as evidenced by the reduction in vice president positions from nine to six).

The university has greatly mitigated the direct impacts on students during the cuts. WSU made a decision to dedicate 50% of revenue from new enrollment for measures that protect instructional programs and student support services. This also included increased support for faculty teaching with technology. Students indicated that the biggest impact to them were the annual increases in tuition over the last four years (14%, 14%, 16%, 16%, respectively, for resident, undergraduate students). The university has done a tremendous job protecting the interests of students. Some smaller manifestations of the cuts were noticed, such as long lines in some Student Services areas and some buildings not being cleaned as regularly. Overall, there were no major reductions in services to students.

The university’s financial operations have been very strong for many years. The 2012 audited financial statements represented the thirteenth consecutive year that the university has had no audit findings. The audit is performed by the State Auditor for the State of Washington. Both the 2011 and 2012 audits were published by the State Auditor less than 180 days after the end of the respective fiscal years, a very respectable time frame. The university has no plans to change auditors. Continuity in audit firms ensures the university will have experienced auditors familiar with the institution and higher education accounting practices and provides additional confidence in the quality of the audit. After the audit is completed, the

Office of the State Auditor annually makes a presentation to the WSU Regents, which gives the Regents the opportunity to hear any concerns or weaknesses identified during the audit.

The university employs an experienced and highly competent team in its Business and Finance area. The Vice President is in his third year with the university. The other senior leaders have decades of WSU experience. The budget is balanced. The audits are clean. Each Vice President, Chancellor and Dean has at least one Area Finance Officer. These positions provide regular fiscal reports for their areas, and serve as a conduit to the central university financial area on any financial or budget issues. Overall, the university is well-positioned with its financial management infrastructure going forward.

The university showed exemplary communication practices during the budget cuts. The President and other senior administrators communicated budget developments and invited feedback using several media including video-streamed budget forums, institution-wide announcements, a President's blog, and a budget suggestion box web site. Officials also met with faculty, staff and student organizations regarding budget and legislative matters during the cuts. These communications were held regularly and were made available to the entire institutional community. The university demonstrated a culture of openness on budget matters.

It is important that the university formalize its budget and financial planning process going forward. Currently, budget initiatives arise through informal means, such as a request by a Dean or Vice President. The President and Provost are very open to these requests. However, there appears to be no structured process that connects the budget with the strategic plan and with long-term financial plans. The recent focus has been substantially on dealing with cuts. Cuts were successfully implemented. Communications were very effective. The university should consider adopting a formal process going forward.

During the budget cuts the university addressed 48% of the loss in funding by increasing tuition rates. These rate increases have not resulted in a loss of enrollment. For undergraduate residents, the Regents set tuition rates within parameters controlled by the state legislature's budget setting process. In its final budget, the legislature assumes the Regents will approve a specific level of tuition change. In its budget assumptions for 2013-15, for example, the 2013 legislature, is discussing tuition rate changes for resident undergraduates ranging between a 3% decrease and a 5% increase. WSU is more dependent on tuition than ever. WSU's President has formed a committee, which includes significant student representation, with the charge of examining WSU's options for long-term stability in tuition rates. This is an admirable endeavor and should be a concern of any institution of higher education. It helps make long term revenue growth more predictable. Unfortunately, under the current environment, the legislature will always have the last word and can shoot down any tuition proposal from the university. If the university's Board of Regents was given the authority to set tuition for WSU independent of the legislative process, it would help the university better manage tuition rates and would allow the university to be more strategic with long-term tuition planning.

WSU adopted several strategic enrollment measures to increase enrollments as part of its response to the budget cuts. Some remarkable accomplishments have resulted: increases in multicultural enrollment from 15 to 20 percent; increases in the number of first-generation students from 17 to 35 percent, and growth in the number of low-income students from 24 to 34 percent. These increases represent important progress not only in growing student enrollment but also in increasing the diversity of the student body. These student populations often require supplemental support services, thus costing the university more in

budget support. The university should insure that it gives ample thought to this issue so that adequate resources are available to support these students. The university should monitor this and address it in the Year 7 accreditation report.

WSU is a member of the PAC-12 athletics conference. The athletics department retains all revenue it generates. The university does not subsidize athletics, which is commendable. Athletics at WSU is in the process of becoming a fully self-sustaining enterprise. WSU's Chief Budget Officer meets with finance personnel from Athletics on a quarterly basis, which insures that the President is kept apprised of the financial situation of the Athletics department.

WSU has a clear relationship with its auxiliaries. The university does not subsidize auxiliaries. Auxiliaries pay an administrative fee that is designed to offset any costs that central administrative offices incur in support of the auxiliaries.

WSU follows a clearly-defined set of principles related to the issuance of debt. The Regents approve all debt prior to issuance, for example. The Regents receive regular reports on current and anticipated debt obligations. The university's financial team regularly analyzes its debt capacity. With the most recent debt offering in the summer of 2012, WSU received a strong Aa2 bond rating from its rating agency. This rating reflected stabilized enrollments and improvements in cash flows and unrestricted net assets. The university is managing its debt.

The WSU Foundation was organized and incorporated in 1979. The most recent agreement between the university and the WSU Foundation was entered into in March 2009. This MOU is still in effect and clearly defines the relationship of the two entities. The agreement identifies applicable state and federal laws pertaining to foundations and establishing guidelines for prudent management of these entities. The agreement includes language regarding the management and investment of the endowment fund and sets expectations for how the fund should be managed, again within the framework of applicable state and federal laws. The seven-member foundation board includes two WSU regents. The entire WSU Board of Regents receives regular investment reports from the WSU Foundation.

The WSU Foundation has assembled a "Code of Ethics" statement and certification. All members of the Board of Governors and others who serve on WSU Foundation standing committees are expected to sign this document. The document sets standards for professional conduct, participation, and other important aspects of involvement with the Foundation.

#### Standard 2.G Physical and Technological Infrastructure

WSU's physical infrastructure reflects both the institution's strategic plan and a well-crafted master plan. The budget cuts have affected the infrastructure, as with other areas of the university. State funding for facilities did not go away during the recession. The state funded \$326 million for several major and minor capital projects. Private donations of \$25 million supplemented that effort. The university has been able to address some needs at all four campuses and numerous agricultural research and extension centers in new buildings and additions, renovations, minor works, preservation, infrastructure, and other miscellaneous projects.

Budget cuts have presented challenges for the maintenance and operations budget for the university. Some of the position reductions occurred in the area of facility care, which resulted in increased

workloads for the remaining staff, reduced frequency of some support services, and deferral of lower priority maintenance. The university is working through these challenges.

WSU's "Institutional Profile" shows that despite the challenges brought about by the economic downturn the university's scores for building condition and what is known as the Facility Condition Index have both improved over the last decade. This is a great accomplishment.

The only concern the committee heard through interviews was related to the relocation of the Pharmacy program to the Spokane campus. The university should examine the location and ensure it has sufficient facilities, security, and parking to deal with this move.

The institution is acutely aware of its deferred maintenance situation. It is an issue for the university like it is everywhere. The financial team is exploring solutions to the problem. They are not in a crisis mode. They balance replacing the worst facilities with upgrading and modernizing other facilities.

WSU employs a comprehensive set of elements to ensure it manages hazardous and toxic materials. Responsibilities are shared by the Offices of Environmental Health and Safety, Research Assurances Biosafety, Radiation Safety, Public Safety, Fire Marshall, and the Nuclear Radiation Center. All sites, including the branch campuses and the various research centers and extension offices, have clear lines of reporting for accidents, injuries, or illnesses related to hazardous materials. In addition, training and other measures are provided to all campuses and locations. These efforts are monitored by several safety committees (e.g. Radiation Safety Committee). The university has clear procedures for reporting to various state, local, and federal entities involved with the university in these matters. Overall, the university appears to have a comprehensive infrastructure for the administration of hazardous and toxic materials.

All WSU academic campuses as well as the research and extension centers have master plans consistent with the mission and strategic plan of the institution as a whole. The plans are regularly updated, are well-done, and incorporate visionary principles. The university emphasizes communication in the preparation of the plans. Faculty, staff, and students are included in the planning process. The university utilizes external consultants as well as university planning staff to prepare, maintain, and update master plans. The most recent update for the Pullman campus exemplifies the inclusiveness and transparency of the planning process. The planning team included university executives, academic leaders, faculty, operational directors (e.g. Director of Parking & Transportation Services), and students. Additional input and feedback was garnered through campus forums and information sessions.

WSU requests state funding for equipment each biennium. Departments use a combination of appropriated funds, grants, grant matching funds, local funds, and donated funds to manage equipment needs. One specific outcome of the budget cuts directly impacted the university's equipment budgets. The legislature stopped funding what it called the "Omnibus Equipment Appropriation." This funding had been dedicated almost exclusively for start-up equipment needs or for large equipment purchases that spanned more than one department. WSU's leadership is working on a solution to replace these funds. One option being considered is changing the distribution of the facilities and administration revenue and dedicating part of these funds to these needs. In the meantime the university is prioritizing equipment purchases to those items that provide significant improvement in efficiency and effectiveness.

WSU completed an extremely important technology improvement in 2012 when it replaced its legacy student information system with an enterprise system that serves the entire university. This new system, named “zzusis,” significantly improved the functionality and access to timely, accurate information. This project was completed on time and in budget. There were some snags with financial aid in the Fall 2012 semester, but the university has resolved those and anticipates no further problems.

The university has addressed other technological needs. Improvements in systems for lecture capturing, web conferencing, and learning management have all been completed.

These efforts are all guided by the university’s Information Technology Strategic Plan. One of the central themes of this plan focuses on I.T. supporting the university’s mission with the best available technology. This has been manifest in the classroom, in services to students, and in tools and support available to employees in the workplace.

## **VIII. Summary**

WSU is a well-established institution of higher education pursuing its research and creative activity, educational, and land-grant mission. It has responded professionally and thoroughly to significant budget reductions during the past several years.

## **IX. Commendations and Recommendations**

### COMMENDATIONS

1. The Peer-Evaluation Committee commends Washington State University for the high level of support that departments and faculty are receiving from the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning. The leadership of and service-oriented approach of this office were cited repeatedly as responsible for the noticeable transformation of the culture of assessment since the Year One Report. The evaluators were pleased to see the extent to which assessment information is currently being used in college, school and institution decision-making. The Institution is to be commended for the level of support that has been provided to build assessment processes, and the commitment to use assessment information in decision-making at all levels. (Standard 2.C.2)
2. The Peer-Evaluation Committee commends Washington State University for communication with students concerning their academic programs. The graduate program fact sheets and the inclusion of full, four-year course sequences of courses for each undergraduate program in the catalog demonstrate excellent guidance to students. (Standards 2.D.3, 2.D.10)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Peer-Evaluation Committee recommends that Washington State University's academic programs continue to strengthen collective faculty responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement of learning outcomes and ensure that student learning outcome information from online programs and courses are consistently included in assessment processes. (Standard 2.C.5).
2. The Peer-Evaluation Committee recommends that Washington State University incorporate student learning outcomes summary information into the evaluation of overall mission fulfillment. (Standard 1.B.2)