

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A Focused Interim Report

Weber State University
Ogden, Utah

April 30, 2007

Prepared by

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A Confidential report Prepared for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
That represents the View of the Evaluator

Introduction

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities reaffirmed Weber State University accreditation in February 2005. In so doing it identified two areas in which WSU was in substantial compliance but which were in need of improvement:

The first recommendation stated: “The Commission recommends that the institution regularly and systematically assess the general education curriculum and document that assessment activities lead to improvement. Based on evidence from faculty, students, administration, and the provided documentation, the Evaluation Committee was unable to verify regular and systematic assessment of the general education curriculum and that assessment activities have led to improvement (Standard 2.B and Policy 2.2 Educational Assessment).”

The second recommendation stated: “The Commission recommends that clearly articulated policies and procedures for evaluating part-time and adjunct faculty be developed, distributed, implemented, and assessed university-wide. The Commission additionally recommends that improvement be made in the mentoring of part-time faculty, as well as in expanding their professional development opportunities. The Evaluation Committee was unable to find sufficient evidence to verify that the institution systematically, regularly, and across all units fulfills its ‘obligation...to evaluate the performance’ of part-time and adjunct faculty members; and was also unable to find evidence that the University provides for their development on a regular basis (Standard 4.A and Policy 4.1 - Faculty Evaluation).”

This focused interim visit was conducted to evaluate the institution’s progress in making these improvements.

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Institutional Report and Support Materials

This evaluation relied upon WSU's March 30, 2007 Focused Interim Report. The focused interim report was organized and thorough in addressing the concerns of the commission and documenting WSU's activities in response to these concerns.

Corroborating Evidence

Members of the General Education Committee provided additional documents including the Mission statement and learning outcomes for Natural Sciences, Life Sciences and Physical Sciences;
Social Sciences General Education Mission Statement and Learning Outcomes;
Humanities and Creative Arts General Education Student Learning Outcomes;
SS General Education Assessment Summary Fall 2006 – Spring 2007

The chair of the Teaching and Learning Forum provided a copy of the April 29, 2007 Adjunct Professional Development Need Assessment and Recommendations for Future Actions.

Adjunct faculty members provided copies of materials for adjunct faculty development including general orientation materials, adjunct newsletters, course syllabi, and copies of online resources for adjunct faculty both for face to face and on line courses.

Individuals whose activities were described in the Focused Interim Report also participated in interviews with this evaluator.

Institutional Participants

Members of the WSU administration, faculty and trustees who participated in the evaluation interviews were:

President Ann Millner
Provost Mike Vaughan

Faculty and staff involved in the General Education Committee and Activities
Dan Bedford
Scott Rogers
Adam Johnston
Brenda Kowalewski
Luke Fernandez
Bruce Bowen

Administrators, faculty and staff who evaluate and provide professional development for adjunct faculty
Pam Rice

Colleen Garside
Scott Rogers
Gale Niklason
Fran Butler
Lewis Gale

Adjunct Faculty
Chris Millard
Sally Cantwell
Diana Cotner
Masoud Rostamkhani

WSU Trustees
Kathryn Lindquist
Tom Davidson

The interviewees were prepared, responsive and forthright in their discussion and answers during the interviews. It is clear that the WSU team is invested in the institution's quality and devoted to the work of institutional improvement.

Evaluation and Analysis: General Education

It should be noted that General Education curriculum in Utah is mandated by the state Board of Regents. Consequently WSU has limited ability to modify this curriculum but does have the ability to establish or change learning outcomes, assessment procedures, pedagogical methods, course materials, instructor qualifications and training, etc. Since receiving the accreditation report, Weber State University has taken significant steps to improve general education assessment.

1. Created a standing committee with oversight of the general education program (The General Education Improvement and Assessment Committee). This committee is charged with articulating the mission and goals of the General Education and university core requirements, defining the standards and overseeing the assessment of as well as making recommendations for changes that will improve outcomes.
2. Engaged the campus in a conversation regarding the purpose of WSU's General Education program and articulated the General Education Learning outcomes. The overall General Education Mission is to provide a diverse foundation in arts and sciences, and to enable students to make intellectually honest, ethical decisions.
3. Identified the General Education outcomes, communicated these to the campus community and received approval from the Faculty Senate. Students are expected to:
 - communicate, understand and interpret ideas and information verbally, orally and visually;
 - think critically and creatively;
 - use quantitative, mathematical relationships and operations;
 - demonstrate an understanding of the history, foundational principles, economics and

- politics of the US;
- demonstrate proficiency in computer and information literacy;
 - demonstrate an understanding of humans, their behavior and interactions with and within their environments;
 - demonstrate an understanding of diverse forms of aesthetic and intellectual expression.
4. Identified and submitted to the faculty senate recommended outcomes for the breadth areas of Science and Social Science as well as Humanities and Creative Arts.
 5. Asked faculty to start identifying measures to determine that learning outcomes have been achieved in General Education courses.
 6. Began collecting data at entry to improve student placement and thus reduce time to degree.
 7. Is assessing the possibility of using the senior capstone courses as an assessment mechanism.

This set of activities has established policy, procedures and measures to comply with the commission recommendations. Perhaps most important is the permanent structural change (creation of the General Education Improvement and Assessment Committee) which empowers the faculty to monitor and improve the General Education program on an ongoing basis. This is a comprehensive and systematic approach for which WSU, and particularly the General Education Improvement and Assessment Committee should be lauded and which appear likely to establish the necessary elements of the General Education program required by the Commission.

Given the complexity of institutional change (including an amendment to the faculty senate constitution) and the amount of time that has passed since the commission issued its recommendations, the amount of progress is considerable. At the same time much remains to be done. The assessment activities are still tentative and preliminary. In addition, while some improvement strategies have been initiated for student placement into general education courses, the strategic use of the data attained through assessment efforts to improve student learning in the general education program has not yet begun. It is vital that WSU sustain its efforts through complete development of assessment strategies and eventually continuous improvement of its General Education efforts. The personal and institutional commitment to do so is evident. Time, continued monitoring and continued support of these activities will be essential.

Evaluation and Analysis: Adjunct Faculty Evaluation and Professional Development.

Adjunct faculty at WSU are quite varied. Some teach courses at WSU on an episodic basis and may do so at other institutions as well. Some are otherwise employed at WSU. Some (eg. Nursing) are appointed only during the time period in which a program is offered in a given geographic area. Some are hired for specific expertise. Some are multi-year and effectively permanent instructors.

Since receiving the Commission's recommendations, WSU has codified and published university policy which requires all academic units to regularly evaluate adjunct faculty. Professional accreditation also adds emphasis to adjunct faculty evaluation in the affected units. The commission's recommendation and discussion of the published policy has resulted in an increase

from 58 to 70% of adjunct faculty who report that they receive regular evaluations. The adjunct faculty interviewed by this evaluator, who had been appointed for more than one year, indicated that they received regular evaluations. Those who were new appointees reported that their evaluation meetings had been scheduled for the subsequent two weeks.

Also since receiving the Commission's recommendation, WSU has developed ways to communicate with adjunct faculty and invited all 439 to participate in the first annual teaching workshop specifically for non-tenure track faculty. Of these 249 participated. Recommendations for the content of subsequent such workshops have been developed as has a strategy for smaller teaching seminars for newly appointed adjunct faculty.

A variety of online resources have been created for adjunct faculty. Those online resources and one on one mentoring by departmental administrators and Information Technology staff were praised by all adjunct faculty in attendance.

It appears that the Commission's recommendation provided a timely impetus to reinvigorate and codify university policy and procedures that had slowed to an idle.

WSU should be commended for this rapid and vigorous response to the recommendation. The continuing challenge will be to maintain the momentum. It is significant that WSU administration has committed funding for ongoing professional development of adjunct faculty.

Commendations.

- a. WSU faculty and administration should be commended for the obvious dedication and enthusiasm, both personal and institutional, it has devoted to institutional improvement.
- b. WSU, and particularly the General Education Improvement and Assessment Committee should be lauded for the comprehensive and systematic approach it has taken to improving General Education Assessment.
- c. WSU, the individual departments, and the Teaching and Learning Forum deserve praise for the thorough and substantial reinvigoration of professional development for adjunct faculty.

Conclusions

Weber State University has made substantial progress in addressing the previous concerns of the Commission. The policies and procedures for evaluation, mentoring and professional development of adjunct faculty are in place, have been executed and plans are in place for their continuation. Allocation of responsibility for General Education improvement and assessment has been made to the newly formed standing committee of the faculty senate. Learning outcomes have been identified and approved. Methods for assessment are currently being identified and these will provide the foundation for continuous improvement of the General Education program. Much still needs to be done but WSU has demonstrated the commitment and

enthusiasm to maintain this momentum.