

Year One Peer-Evaluation Report

Western Nevada College

Carson City, Nevada

March 1 – May 6, 2011

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

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Introduction

Western Nevada College (WNC), founded in 1971, is one of four community colleges within the Nevada System of Higher Education. Based in Carson City, the College serves the residents of the seven northwestern counties of Nevada: Carson City, Douglas, Churchill, Pershing, Mineral, Storey, and Lyon. The College offers a wide variety of associate degrees, certificates of achievement, a Bachelor of Technology degree in Construction Management, work force training, and community education. In 2009-10, the College awarded 481 degrees and certificates. The number of full-time degree-seeking students rose 36%, from 998 to 1,362.

From March 1 to May 6, 2011, a three-person peer-evaluation team from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (Commission) conducted a year one comprehensive peer evaluation of Western Nevada College in an off-site virtual environment. The structure of the evaluation consisted of a virtual organizational meeting and virtual evaluation meetings through audio conferencing authorized by the Commission. The peer evaluation was conducted based upon the Commission's 2010 Accreditation Standards and Eligibility Requirements.

Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report

The Evaluation Committee received a hard copy of the College's *Year One Self-Evaluation Report* and a copy of its *2010-2011 Catalog* in a timely manner. The report showed evidence of broad-based participation by campus constituencies, including administration, faculty, staff, and students.

The Committee found the report properly organized and appropriately cited for ease of comparison to Standard 1 Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations. The report provided an introduction, institutional overview, and preface, which gave the Committee a general overview of the College, its basic tenets, and recent institutional changes. Although the Committee found the *Year One Self-Evaluation Report* generally clear and readable, a visual graph or an appendix may have improved the clarity and understanding between core themes, objectives, and indicators of achievement.

The College provided an addendum to address Recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the *Spring 2010 Comprehensive Report*; however, upon confirmation by the Commission, the addendum is to be included in the College's spring 2013 Year Three Self-Evaluation Report. The Committee recognized the College's response to the recommendations but did not assess the College's progress in addressing said recommendations.

Report on Eligibility Requirements

The Evaluation Committee understood that the Commission's request to provide an Executive Summary of Eligibility Requirements (ER) 2 and 3 was a late addition to the guidelines for writing the Year One Self-Evaluation Report. Thus, the Committee

encourages WNC to follow the guidelines released in March of 2011 to ensure that its next report addresses the ERs as noted in the guidelines.

Western Nevada College is authorized to operate and award certificates and degrees as a higher education institution as authorized by the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) Board of Regents. (Eligibility Requirement 2)

As documented in its *Year One Self-Evaluation Report*, WNC has defined its mission and core themes, which are consistent with its legal authorization and are appropriate to the seven northwestern counties of the state of Nevada to which it serves. The Evaluation Committee found evidence in both the report and *2010-11 Catalog* that the College's mission and core themes well support the educational interests of its students, and its programs lead to recognized degrees and certificates of completion. The NSHE Board of Regents approved the College's current mission statement in April of 2009. However, the Board of Regents has not officially approved the College's core themes. As indicated in the self-evaluation report, the College plans to present its core themes to the NSHE Board of Regents in spring of 2012. (Eligibility Requirement 3)

Concern:

1. Although the College plans to present its core themes to the NSHE Board of Regents, the College will need to provide evidence that its governing board has officially adopted the College's core themes. (Eligibility Requirement 3)

Section One

Introduction:

Western Nevada College articulated its mission statement in the *Year One Self-Evaluation Report* as "Western Nevada College inspires success in our community through opportunities that cultivate creativity, intellectual growth and technological excellence, in an environment that nurtures individual potential and respects differences."

The Committee found that the mission statement provides purpose and expectations of the College with respect to fulfillment of that purpose. The College provided its interpretation of mission fulfillment, noting that the "...mission focuses on student success." To ensure that students are successful, the College noted that "the institution itself must be excellent in terms of its human and physical resources and be responsive to the diverse needs of its communities." In support of its mission statement, the College has identified three core themes: Student Success, Institutional Excellence, and One College/Many Communities. The College has identified three objectives to tie the three core themes to the mission statement and has identified 17 indicators of achievement to measure the level of success for each respective objective.

Report on Standard 1.A Mission:

Western Nevada College has a mission statement that is appropriate for an institution of higher learning. The College's mission statement is widely published and was recently approved by the NSHE Board of Regents in spring of 2009. The College's mission provides context and meaning for the College's efforts. The mission statement, as noted in the College's *Year One Self-Evaluation Report*, derived from and is understood by the college community. (Standard 1.A.1)

The College defines mission fulfillment in terms of student success. To ensure that success, WNC has identified three strategic plan objectives, and to measure student success, it has identified ten general education student learning outcomes that students are expected to demonstrate upon completion of their degree. Although the College has defined mission fulfillment in terms of student success through these objectives and notes that it "measures the extent to which these objectives are met using established thresholds for achievement for its indicators," the report does not provide these thresholds of achievements. (Standard 1.A.2)

Concern:

1. The College has defined mission fulfillment. However, additional work is necessary to articulate a threshold of acceptable performance for strategic plan objectives and general education student learning outcomes in determining the extent to which mission fulfillment is achieved. (Standard 1.A.2)

Report on Standard 1.B Core Themes:

Western Nevada College identifies three core themes that manifest its mission statement. These include Student Success, Institutional Excellence, and One College/Many Communities. The Evaluation Committee found that these themes were developed through broad-based participation by campus constituencies. (Standard 1.B.1)

The College has identified objectives, indicators of achievement, and rationale for each of the three core themes, providing a framework for a cycle of continual improvement. While the College has developed seventeen indicators of achievement, the Evaluation Committee found that several indicators of achievement did not provide sufficient breadth to evaluate completely the success of objectives. For example, the objective of Core Theme #1 is to "improve student success in program completion and graduation rates." The first indicator of achievement is high school to WNC continuation rate. The rationale and data included in the *Year One Report* support this objective, but the indicator does not provide breadth to support all students (i.e., career changers, non-traditional students, etc.) who pursue a degree at WNC.

Likewise, the second set of indicators of achievement for Core Theme #1 support students who pursue degrees. However, the indicators do not seem to include all degree-seeking students (i.e., ABE, ESL, and GED students, remedial and developmental education students,

and professional-technical education students). Further work is needed to ensure that indicators of achievement provide sufficient breadth for evaluating the success of each objective. (Standard 1.B.2)

Though the College has established indicators of achievement for each objective, the Committee found no clear benchmarks to ensure that results are verifiable, thus providing the basis for evaluating the accomplishment of each objective for each core theme. As one example, the third and fourth indicators of achievement for Core Theme #1 place emphasis on student satisfaction and student and employee diversity, yet, like most indicators, there are no performance measures in which to gauge success. Further work is needed to refine current indicators of achievement to ensure that results are meaningful and measurable for evaluating the accomplishment of the objectives for each core theme. (Standard 1.B.2)

The College has done considerable work in creating a conceptual framework that manifests essential elements of its mission, but the Evaluation Committee was unclear how some indicators would inform meaningful judgments of success. For Core Theme #2, indicators of achievement include full-time to part-time faculty ratios, student and faculty FTE, existence of articulation agreements, existence of active advisory committees, and degrees and qualifications of personnel. The Evaluation Committee was unclear how these indicators “ensure[d] institutional excellence in teaching, programs, and services.” Additional work is needed to show a clear connection between indicators and the achievement of objectives for each core theme. (Standard 1.B.2)

Concern:

1. The College has identified objectives, indicators of achievement, and rationale for each of its three core themes. However, additional work is needed to provide breadth to indicators of achievement so that they completely encompass objectives for each core theme, additional work is needed to refine current indicators of achievement to ensure that results are meaningful and measurable for evaluating the accomplishment of the objectives for each core theme, and additional work is needed to show a clear connection between indicators and the achievement of objectives for each core theme. (Standard 1.B.2)

Summary

Western Nevada College's *Year One Self-Evaluation Report* guided the Evaluation Committee through the College's conceptual framework, enabling the Committee to gain insight into and to provide an objective evaluation of WNC's intentions with respects to Eligibility Requirements 2 and 3 and Standard One.

The Evaluation Committee found that the College has a mission statement that is appropriate for a comprehensive community college. The mission statement provides context and meaning for WNC's efforts. The College has identified mission fulfillment in terms of student success through strategic plan objectives and general education student

learning outcomes. The Evaluation Committee encourages the College to identify a level of achievement for each. The College has identified three core themes. Each core theme is supported by objectives, indicators of achievement, and rationale. The Evaluation Committee encourages the College to provide indicators of achievement that are meaningful and measurable and supportive of core theme objectives.

Recommendations

Recommendations:

1. While core themes are clearly defined, are consistent with the College's legal authorization, and are appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education, they have not been adopted by the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents—the College's governing board. The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College provide evidence that its core themes have been adopted by its governing board. (Eligibility Requirement 3)
2. While the College has defined mission fulfillment in terms of student success through three strategic plan objectives and ten general education student learning outcomes, it has not identified a level achievement for each. The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College identify an acceptable threshold of mission fulfillment based upon identified objectives and outcomes. (Standard 1.A.2)
3. Though the College has identified objectives, indicators of achievement, and rationale for each of its three core themes, the Evaluation Committee recommends that the College provide indicators that are meaningful and measurable and that provide a clear connection between the indicators of achievement and objectives. (Standard 1.B.2)