

MID-CYCLE PEER-EVALUATION REPORT

GREEN RIVER COLLEGE

AUBURN, WA

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

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MID-CYCLE EVALUATION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Green River College, located in Auburn Washington, was granted Initial Accreditation in 1967 as Green River Community College and its accreditation was last reaffirmed in July 2013 after evaluation of its Spring 2013 Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report.

The year 7 visit resulted in five Recommendations. Recommendations 2 and 3 were addressed in an Appendix to the Year 1 Report submitted in March 2014, and Recommendation 4 was addressed in two Ad Hoc reports submitted Feb 2015 and Feb 2016. NWCCU communicated to Green River that the Board of Commissioners' expectations for Recommendations 2, 3 and 4 have now been met.

Recommendations 1 and 5 are addressed in the Addendum (Sections 1 and II, respectively) accompanying this Mid-cycle evaluation.

Since its reaffirmation following the Year 7 Report, Green River has, via the Substantive change process been approved to offer five Bachelor's of Applied Science degrees, and at this writing is in candidacy status at the baccalaureate level.

This report includes observations from a March 2016 Mid-Cycle Evaluation visit, and includes an assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report (and supporting materials), responses to Recommendations 1 and 5 from the Year Seven Report, and the BAS Candidacy

ASSESSMENT OF SELF-EVALUATION REPORT AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

The Mid-cycle report answered the questions posed by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) for a mid-cycle visit, but because the supporting information and evidence was not built directly into the report, assessing the status of the work more difficult than it could have been. For example, report did not list the indicators or any of the measured values obtained over the last two years, which would have been helpful. The college did provide the evaluators with many links and documents in which key elements could be found, but it required quite a bit of triangulation on the part of the evaluators to identify and connect the relevant information. At the same time, the team would like to thank the college for working to clarify questions about the report and its supporting materials during the time leading up to the campus visit and during the visit itself. Information was provided in a collegial, courteous, and timely manner. The college was open to frank discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of various processes, as well as some of the internal tensions that have made development challenging. We would also like to recognize and thank the college for its gracious hospitality,

MID-CYCLE EVALUATION FORMAT

As directed by NWCCU, the intent of this report is to evaluate the processes that Green River College is using as it continues to assess its core themes in support of verifying mission fulfillment. As the college was asked to organize its report into three distinct parts, the evaluation team has chosen to address each part in a similar narrative fashion.

PART I: ASSESSING MISSION FULFILLMENT

The College has four Core Themes that align with four instructional areas of the college: College Transfer, Career and Technical, College Readiness, and Continuing and Community Education. The Core Objectives, along with the initially proposed indicators, were laid out in the Year One report. The college also developed a strategic plan that aligns with both the Core Themes and the 7 year accreditation cycle. Each Core Theme has five objectives: Access, Success, Equity, Responsiveness and Collaboration. The structure of common objectives across the core themes is seen as creating a strongly interwoven fabric for four of the college's nine Core Values.

Core Theme Councils, most of which existed prior to the current accreditation model and formal establishment of the Core Themes, are given responsibility for identifying and annually reviewing and evaluating the appropriateness of the indicators of achievement for each objective. The system of mission fulfillment employs a scorecard approach: the number of points under each outcome is proportional to the percentage of total enrollment for that area. Those points are distributed according to the number of indicators under each of the objectives.

The report notes that during the first two academic years of the Strategic Plan implementation, the Board of Trustees and Core Theme Council reviewed data collected annually, and the Councils were involved in revising indicators as needed to ensure that they were valid, measurable and appropriate.

Detailed reports on the status of each core theme are prepared annually for the Board of Trustees, for the Core Theme councils to review, and were also made available to the evaluators. These reports note that 2013-14 was fundamentally a year of development, though there were some measurements that we either revised or continued in 2014-15. The majority of indicator measures with baselines identified and points assigned were presented first in the 2014-15 reports for all four Core Outcomes. The reports provide a record of revisions to indicators, baselines and targets. The plans anticipate that by the 2016-17 reporting year the Indicators will be mostly stabilized, so that at least three years of data will be available before the Year Seven visit. In our discussions with the Core Theme Council representatives it was not clear that this process of review and reflection has happened with regularity. Other issues relating to changes in governance structure and a new process for prioritizing programs appeared to have distracted from Core Theme review; the meetings were scheduled regularly but attendance as not consistent.

At present there are no indicators that relate directly to students' attainment of learning outcome in any of the Core Themes, at any level. Because Green River's Core Themes all relate to areas of instruction, assessment of student learning would seem to be an important measure of mission fulfillment. This was acknowledged in the Mid-Cycle report as a suggestion brought forward by the Chair of the Learning Outcomes Committee, and identified major area of future alignment. The evaluation team agrees with and supports this suggestion, and it was discussed this during the visit with several groups. The college clearly recognizes the importance developing appropriate systems of assessment that will lead to meaningful measures of achievement of student learning outcomes, and will need to make significant progress in this area prior to the Year Seven report.

PART II: OPERATIONAL EXAMPLES

The Mid Cycle report and supporting evidence suggested that the college is moving in the right direction with a plan, but the work is still emerging. Efforts to organize assessment, from conversations and concept to results and reporting, have begun, and are in different stages of development across the college.

The two operational examples offered were for the Business Program (focusing on 2 degrees) and Information Technology Program (3 degrees). In the report, the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for each for the degrees were identified, as were the applicable Career & Technical Core Outcomes Objectives and Indicators (which were the same for all 5 degrees). Alignment between these was suggested by the presentation, but not clear. Similarly, the four College Wide Learning Outcomes were identified as inferred for each degree. The report indicated that more deliberate mapping is pending.

The report did not include the specific assessment information for any of the degrees, but evaluators were provided with the documentation submitted thus far, the most helpful of which was the new common template recently developed by the Instructional Assessment Coordinator. The template provides a framework with which faculty can develop and report their methods, benchmarks, results, and follow-up.

The AAA Business Management program collected data in 2015, but because they wish to use this first year of collection as their baseline, will not be analyzing the data until Spring 2016. The BAS Marketing and Entrepreneurship will begin collecting data in the Fall of 2016 and analyze the results in the Spring of 2017. The AAS-T Information Technology – Systems will be collecting data over the next three years. The BAS: Information Technology - Network Administration & Security and the BAS Information Technology: Software Development will both begin the assessment process this year.

While strong planning was evident for all 5 degrees offered as operational examples, the actual assessment appears to have only been carried out for The AAS in Business management, for which no specific results were cited, owing to the sense that the first year of collection was needed to establish a baseline (suggesting that plan is to report results only in relation to the baseline). The template will certainly help faculty from most/all programs organize and present the specific information about program-level assessment, since the methods used, results obtained and follow up actions planned are all fields on the template. Their efficacy will be clearer once they put it into general and widespread use and with reportable results.

Although most of the college programs have program outcomes this does not appear to be the case for all, especially for the General Education disciplines, and in particular, in the Arts . Humanities and Social Sciences (<http://www.greenriver.edu/about-us/learning-outcomes-committee/program-level-outcomes.htm>). Evidence of assessment in programs is much more limited. The imperatives of developing and reporting metrics for a recently developed Program Prioritization Process seemed to have sidelined assessment efforts. It will require quite a lot of work to define appropriate program-level outcomes (especially where programs are newly defined sets of disciplines), figure out how they will be assessed, and carry out the assessment, and as long as Green River is not graduating majors in transfer disciplines, it may be more appropriate to focus on the CWLOs (College Wide Learning Outcomes).

The college has made progress in assessing the College Wide Learning Outcomes (CWLOs). All courses in the college have identified which of the 4 CWLOs are addressed in the course – this is a long-standing

part of program approval. The Learning Outcomes Committee has piloted an approach that relies upon identifying students who are close to graduation and either by testing or collecting examples of students work, evaluates their attainment of the CWLO's. There are plans to take the pilot to broader scale.

PART III: MOVING FORWARD

Green River College recognizes the need to align its several planning and assessment processes. Core theme and mission fulfillment criteria are, by design, aligned with strategic planning, and linked with budget planning. A separate set of criteria is intended link the Program Prioritization Process with budgetary considerations in a manner that has not yet developed. While assessment of student learning is acknowledged as an important element in this alignment, it has not yet been identified as integral to either process.

With regards to the core theme objectives and indicators, the plan presented in the Year One report anticipated stabilization of the indicators by 2015-16. To date, annual reviews have occurred and some changes made. The addition of indicators for attainment of student learning outcomes would likely push the stabilization date out somewhat, since the measures and metrics would be quite different from those currently in use, and are still in development.

The report outlined the steps to address developing Program Learning Outcomes and a process to assess those outcomes. The plan includes the creation of comprehensive assessment plans, the collection of artifacts, and a process for assessing and documenting proposed curricular changes as a result of assessment findings. It will also be important for the college to make assessment a priority.

The Learning Outcomes Committee has also recently initiated a process for the assessment of Campus Wide Learning Outcomes (CWLOs), piloting an approach that relies upon identifying students who are close to graduation in a manner independent of program or discipline-specific assessment. A long-standing requirement the courses address at least one of the CWLOs will likely support both the development of student attainment and assessment of these outcomes. The measures/metrics developed from this should make them useful as indicators of Mission Fulfillment. This may be especially useful in the area of College transfer as the CWLOs are fairly similar to traditional General Education outcomes.

Administration should support the complex conversations that faculty need to have to make assessment make sense across a set of courses that is related by discipline and/or outcome. Evidence of faculty interest is clearly present in some disciplines, as evidenced by the conversations that took place during the site visit. The conversation is clearly changing, but it will take some work to make it happen. Direct indicators will need to be developed. More faculty, in more disciplines, will need to be engaged in order to develop a culture of assessment. Green River will need to continue to ask the key questions and press the conversation towards meaningful approaches to assessment of student learning. The college has developed a tool that will help programs organize their assessment work as much as it will facilitate reporting of methods and results.

Communication with the college about the information contained in the board reports is identified as a need, and it was noted that IR is working on a dashboard presentation to that end, as well as advising the councils on the analysis of the data.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing Green River's Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report and visiting the campus, the evaluation team believes that the college is positioned to provide evidence of mission fulfillment and sustainability in its Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. Green River has a lot of work ahead of them in the area of outcomes and assessments, and the college and faculty will need to make this a high priority in the next four years in preparation of the Year Seven-accreditation visit.

RESPONSES TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2014 YEAR SEVEN PEER EVALUATION REPORT

Green River Community College addressed the two recommendations from its 2013 Year Seven report that had not yet been reviewed by the Commission, Addendums I and II of the Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report. Per Commission correspondence, the team addressed both Recommendations 1 and 5.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College ensure the alignment between the mission statement and the core themes – that the core themes “individually manifest” and “collectively encompass” the College mission statement (1.B.1), that the core theme objectives and verifiable indicators be sufficient to evaluate the accomplishment of core themes (1.B.2), and that the evaluation of program s and services be holistically informed by indicator data for each core theme objective (3.B.3, 4.A.4)

Alignment of Mission to Core Themes (1.B.1):

The mission under which the college was operating at the time of the year 7 report was

“Green River Community College improves the lives of people within our diverse communities by providing quality education and training programs”

As described in the Year 1 report, the Mission Statement was updated (September 2013) by specifically identifying the educational program areas that are referenced the body of the mission statement. The revised mission statement”

“Ensure student success through comprehensive educational programs* and support services responsive to our diverse communities.

***Comprehensive educational programs: College Transfer Education, Career & Technical Education, College Readiness Education, Continuing & Community Education as defined by Revised Code of Washington [RCW 28B.50.020](#).”**

Given that the identified educational programs align precisely the Core Themes, the evaluation team believes that Green River has satisfied the Recommendation relating to Standard 1.B.1

Sufficiency of Core Theme objectives and Verifiable Indicators (1.B.2)

Green River has aligned its 7 year strategic plan with the Core Themes, objectives and indicators, as well as with the 7 year accreditation cycle. The Core Objectives and indicators, along with the points assigned to each, were outlined in the Year 1 report. For most indicators targets were listed as “under discussion” with the appropriate Core theme Council. . The reports for 2013-14 show development of the targets, and the reports for 2014-15 show data and the points assigned based on the results in relation to those targets. The Core Theme Councils meet periodically to review indicators and data, and determine whether the indicators are appropriate.

Development of the metrics of the indicators are the responsibility of the Core Theme Councils, and can be followed via the Core Theme Reports that are prepared annually for the Board of Trustees. The evaluators were provided with these reports, which are quite complex, including additional contextual material that was important to the board (other major initiatives, strategic plan etc.). The 13-14 resorts (and Mission Fulfillment summary) focused on identifying baselines values and targets. The 2014-15 report is the first cycle to report data and compare it with identified targets, and calculate the points for the scorecard.

The indicators collectively appear to be mostly sufficient to evaluate the accomplishment of core themes, and are meaningful, assessable and verifiable indicators of achievement. However, there are, at present no indicators explicitly related to student achievement of learning outcomes. The evaluators felt that the identified objectives and indicators are largely sufficient, except of the lack of direct assessment of student learning.

Core theme planning, and planning for programs and services is informed by the collection of appropriately defined data that are informed by collections of data (3.B.3)

The core theme councils have identified initial and existing strategies and initiatives that are tied to core theme objectives, such that the measurement of the related indicators can be used to inform where strategic attention can “move the needle.” Given one year of data, there are some indications for future focus. The college acknowledges the need for more work in this area.

At the level of programs and services, the Year Seven report had noted that while many different systems of planning have been implemented at the college, the lack of a comprehensive system of evaluation. To address this need (and also in order to tie budget planning to program evaluations in a transparent manner), the college developed and implemented a Program Prioritization Process (PPP) in 2015-16. Programs were directed to provide a defined picture of program status based on rubrics within a framework common to one of three “pillars:” Instruction, Student support, Institutional support. At the time of the evaluation visit, the results had been collected, and were shortly to be released to the college community. The PPP appears to be a sound mechanism by which a common set of criteria can be used to assess programs and services, and make decisions that are informed by these criteria, though it is in the beginning stages of use, with plans to align the results more closely to help with budget planning.

Holistic Evaluation: Alignment, Correlation and Integration of Program Programs and Services with respect to Accomplishment of Core Theme objectives (4.A.4).

The original objectives developed by the Executive team directly align with long term and strategic goals. The focus and purpose of the PPP, with an immediate link to budgetary planning, appears to be distinct from the longer range core themes and strategic planning. The addendum report for this section of the recommendation describes the steps that will be taken to develop both processes, mostly independently. (“A lot of conversation will take place on how these two processes overlap”). The college appears to have developed a framework to simplify its planning in these two significant (but different) approaches. It is likely that taken together, these would provide a more complete and holistic picture of the college’s operations within its mission objectives, but it does not appear that there will be a focused attempt to correlate or integrate these evaluative and planning tools, at least not until each is developed into greater functionality. The report did, however, note that “a lot of conversation will take place on how these two processes overlap,” suggesting that some convergence will be sought.

For Recommendation 1, the Evaluation team believes that for Standards 1.B.2, 3.B.3 and 4.A.4, significant progress has been made.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The evaluation team recommends that the College move aggressively to implement an effective and comprehensive system of direct and authentic assessment that appraises student accomplishment of existing course, program, and college-wide learning outcomes from which are derived meaningful results that provide clear direction for curricular and instructional improvement. (4.A.3, 4.A.6, 4.B.1, 4.B.2)

Green River cites their long tradition of active oversight over both the curriculum and development of learning outcomes process, supported largely by the Learning Outcomes Committee (LOC). In addition to the outcomes that have been identified for most of the degree programs, the college has identified four Campus-wide Learning Outcomes (CWLOs), and the LOC has been working to support meaningful assessment of these, as well as providing professional development for faculty in the principles and mechanics of assessment of student learning. Assessment reports have been submitted and are posted on the public facing website (<http://www.greenriver.edu/about-us/learning-outcomes-committee/assessment-reports.htm>); these show development of assessment methodologies, but the LOC recognizes that a more systematic method of collecting information about student learning is needed.

The Evaluation Committee found that Green River has had, over the past couple of years, several initiatives going on all at once and that outcomes and assessment has really not been one of the top priorities for the college. However, the LOC has continued to work on approaches to assessment, and the Department of Institutional Effectiveness has invested in a position dedicated to supporting that work. The role of the Director of Institutional Assessment, Evaluation, & Analysis is to develop assessment tools to assess the College Wide Learning Outcomes, and also help faculty develop program level outcomes and assessments. The individual hired into this position is skilled at working with faculty, and developing assessment strategies and implementation.

The recently developed template for program and assessment plans and reporting at the program level can be used across the college, and that should provide a solid framework for all of the college's programs as they begin the work of developing assessments for each outcome. Faculty on the various committees are engaged in this work, but faculty in programs will need to be more broadly involved in developing program outcomes and meaningful assessments. The template also prompts programs to identify curricular and instructional improvements that are suggested by the data, and to subsequently close the loop by noting whether improvements were helpful. The structure is strong, but has yet to be widely implemented.

At the level of the CWLOs, the LOC initiated a Campus Assessment Redesign Process in 2014-15, piloting an approach that relies upon identifying students who are close to graduation in a manner independent of program or discipline-specific assessment. A combination of direct assessment (summative exams, or evaluating examples of students work) for Written Communication, Quantitative & Symbolic Reasoning, and Critical Thinking), and instructor observation and indirect assessment (for Student Responsibility) are expected to provide measures of student attainment of the CWLO's. The work to date was noted as emerging; the LOC plans to take the pilot to broader scale.

As noted in their response to this recommendation, Green River has been working on planning for some time; now they need to implement their plan of action campus wide, collect sufficient data to analyze,

and use that data to make improvements. The evaluation team believes that the elements of assessment are in place, but more work is needed to meet the expectations of the recommendation.