

Year One Peer-Evaluation Report

Grays Harbor College

Aberdeen, Washington

Spring 2012

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

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Introduction

Grays Harbor College (hereinafter also referred to as “College” or GHC”) is a two-year institution that is part of a broad network of over 30 community colleges in the Washington State system. It serves a population of approximately 94,000 people within a 3,000 square-mile district and had 1,954 full-time equivalent students in 2010-11.

In accordance with guidelines of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (hereinafter also referred to as “Commission” or “NWCCU”), this Year One Peer-Evaluation Report provides an assessment of the quality and usefulness of the GHC Year One Self-Evaluation Report and evaluates the institution with respect to Eligibility Requirement 2 (Authority), Eligibility Requirement 3 (Mission and Core Themes), and Standard One (Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations). The information presented in the Peer-Evaluation Report provides support for any Compliments, Concerns, Commendations, and Recommendations. The Peer-Evaluation Report does not comment on the College’s responses to two previous NWCCU recommendations, as per instructions from Commission staff.

The Evaluation Panel conducted its review in an off-site, virtual environment.

Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report

Grays Harbor College provided electronic and printed copies of its Year One Self-Evaluation Report in a timely fashion. The Self-Evaluation Report was structured in accordance with NWCCU guidelines in a manner that facilitated review by the Evaluation Panel. While a printed copy of the College's catalog was not provided as specified in the NWCCU Guidelines for the Preparation of Year One Self-Evaluation Reports, the evaluators were able to easily access the 2011-2012 General Catalog electronically via the college web site.

The GHC administration, faculty, and staff are recognized for their intentional and significant efforts in addressing Eligibility Requirements 2 and 3 and Standard One in the Self-Evaluation Report. The College is acknowledged for a clear, well-written report that followed most guidelines established by the Commission. The headings, formatting, and supporting graphics made the report easy to follow, understand, and analyze. The report did not contain headings to specifically address Eligibility Requirements 2 and 3, although the subjects were addressed in other sections of the report.

A weakness of the report was a lack of specificity in outcomes listed for mission fulfillment and for indicators of achievement under the core themes. Additional information is needed to evaluate desired thresholds for mission fulfillment (Standard 1.A.2) and to determine if indicators used to evaluate the core theme objectives are verifiable (Standard 1.B.2).

Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility Requirement 2: The institution is authorized to operate and award degrees as a higher education institution by the appropriate governmental organization, agency, or governing board as required by the jurisdiction in which it operates.

Grays Harbor College is part of Washington's public community college system established by the State Legislature in 1967. The Legislature designated the College to serve Grays Harbor and Pacific counties. The College also has an internal Board of Trustees that governs ongoing operations.

Eligibility Requirement 2 is addressed in the Institutional Context section of the Self-Evaluation Report (page 2), and the evaluators are satisfied the College meets this requirement.

Eligibility Requirement 3: The institution's mission and core themes are clearly defined and adopted by its governing board(s) consistent with its legal authorization, and are appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education. The institution's purpose is to serve the educational interests of its students and its principal programs lead to recognized degrees. The institution devotes all, or substantially all, of its resources to support its educational mission and core themes.

Eligibility Requirement 3 is addressed in the Introduction section of the Self-Evaluation Report (page 1). The evaluators found the mission and core themes of the College to be appropriate, and evidence was also found of resources and efforts implemented to support the central mission and the core themes.

Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

Standard One: The institution articulates its purpose in a mission statement, and identifies core themes that comprise essential elements of that mission. In an examination of its purpose, characteristics, and expectations, the institution defines the parameters for mission fulfillment. Guided by that definition, it identifies an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment.

All of the core themes for the College are reflected in the current mission statement: "Grays Harbor College provides meaningful education and cultural enrichment through academic transfer, workforce preparation, basic skills, and service to community."

Standard 1.A Mission

Standard 1.A.1: The institution has a widely published mission statement—approved by its governing board—that articulates a purpose appropriate for an institution of higher learning, gives direction for its efforts, and derives from, and is generally understood by, its community.

The GHC mission statement was developed in 2008, adopted by the Board of Trustees in 2009, and reviewed and renewed in 2011 in preparation for the Year One Self-Evaluation Report. The evaluators found the mission statement to be widely published, including the current catalog and the web site.

A broad cross section of key college constituencies were involved in developing the original mission statement and in the subsequent review, but the report provides

limited information on the level of community involvement. It is, therefore, unclear from the report to what extent the college mission statement derives from and is understood by the community.

Standard 1.A.2: The institution defines mission fulfillment in the context of its purpose, characteristics, and expectations. Guided by that definition, it articulates institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment.

The College defines mission fulfillment as making effective use of resources and capacities to produce demonstrable success in the key objectives of student progression, student completion, student transition, lifelong learning, cultural enrichment, and partnerships serving the community. GHC has developed a table that assigns weights to outcomes under the key objectives, with the weights in each core theme adding up to 100; 80% has been set as the acceptable threshold for mission fulfillment. The clear and visually-appealing conceptual design appears on page 7 of the Self-Evaluation Report. The outcomes do not currently include scoring metrics, benchmarks, or specific measurement parameters to verify that thresholds have been achieved. The evaluators note that the Self-Evaluation Report is refreshingly candid in recognizing that measures must still be developed.

Compliment 1: The College is complimented for designing a comprehensive conceptual model that effectively and clearly communicates the connection between core themes, objectives, and mission fulfillment.

Concern 1: The Evaluation Panel is concerned that specific measures and targets need to be refined and articulated to define an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment.

Standard 1.B Core Themes

Standard 1.B.1: The institution identifies core themes that individually manifest essential elements of its mission and collectively encompass its mission.

Grays Harbor College has identified four core themes. The evaluators found clear connections between the identified themes, the institutional goals, and the mission statement. The four core themes focus on: (1) Academic Transfer; (2) Workforce Preparation; (3) Basic Skills; and (4) Lifelong Learning.

The core themes are drawn directly from the mission statement. Each of the first three themes includes objectives for student progression, completion, and transition. The last core theme includes objectives for lifelong learning, cultural enrichment, and community partnerships.

Compliment 2: The College is complimented for its efforts to develop core themes that comprise essential elements of its mission and collectively encompass it.

Standard 1.B.2: The institution establishes objectives for each of its core themes and identifies meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement that form the basis for evaluating accomplishment of the objectives of its core themes.

Desired outcomes are defined for each objective, with indicators of achievement identified for each intended outcome. The evaluators found the objectives and indicators to be generally meaningful and appropriate for each theme. However, the evaluators identified concerns that some indicators may not be fully assessable and verifiable as currently written. For example, objective 3 for core theme 4 indicates the College will measure the number of partnerships with civic organization, educational institutions, business and industry groups, and government agencies. However, no specific goals or targets are identified, making it difficult to ensure the measures are assessable and verifiable. The rationales and conceptual framework for each objective were clear and provide a good framework to add specific measures to improve the ability of the College to make each indicator assessable and verifiable.

Concern 2: The Evaluation Panel is concerned that not all indicators of achievement include meaningful measures that are assessable and verifiable.

Summary

Grays Harbor College serves a changing area where specific industries (fishing and timber) are declining. The College also serves a population with one of the highest unemployment rates in the state and the second highest percentage of students receiving financial aid.

The College has refined its mission and purpose to reflect the needs of its service region. The mission has been approved by its governing board and articulates a clear purpose for the College. The institutional goals and core themes flow from and are driven by the mission statement. Significant work has been completed to identify and communicate a sophisticated conceptual model that will be used to measure mission fulfillment and acceptable thresholds of accomplishment. However, additional targets and levels of attainment are needed to ensure all objectives and indicators of achievement are assessable, meaningful, and measureable.

Commendation and Recommendations

Commendation 1: The College is commended for designing a comprehensive conceptual model that effectively and clearly communicates the connection between the mission, core themes, objectives, outcomes, and mission fulfillment.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended the College continue the significant work it has started to articulate outcomes or institutional accomplishments that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment. (Standard 1.A.2)

Recommendation 2: It is recommended the College continue efforts to establish meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement that form the basis for evaluating accomplishment for all of its core theme objectives. (Standard 1.B.2)