EVALUATOR RESPONSE: MID-CYLE SELF-EVALUATION

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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OCTOBER 27 – 28, 2014
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Overview

On behalf of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the evaluators conducted a review of the September 2014 Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report of Central Washington University and visited the campus to meet with faculty, administrators, and staff on October 27-28, 2014. In addition, the evaluators read the report of the Year One Peer-Evaluation Report Evaluation Committee from October 2011 and noted the two recommendations made at that time. The intent of this review is to provide Central Washington University suggestions for improving their processes so that they will be prepared for and adept at responding to the eligibility requirements and standards for their comprehensive Year Seven report and visit.

Central Washington University (CWU) is one of six publicly supported baccalaureate institutions in the state of Washington and one of the state’s three regional comprehensive universities. CWU was established in 1890 as Washington State Normal School and, over time and through various iterations, by 1977 had become CWU. State law mandates that the mission of regional universities such as CWU is to “offer undergraduate and graduate education programs through the master’s degree, including programs of a practical and applied nature, directed to the educational and professional needs of the residents of the regions they serve; to act as receiving institutions for transferring community college students; and to provide extended occupational and complementary studies programs that continue or are otherwise integrated with the educational services of the region’s community colleges.”

CWU currently offers 96 undergraduate and 36 graduate degrees within the colleges of Arts and Humanities, Education and Professional Studies, Sciences, and Business. Undergraduate and graduate degrees, minors, and certificate programs are offered on the Ellensburg campus, seven teaching sites, and online for a total university enrollment of 11,287 during the 2013-2014 academic year. Undergraduate enrollment makes up approximately 92 percent of total enrollment with graduate education constituting the remaining eight percent. The seven teaching sites outside Ellensburg offer upper-division and graduate coursework. Four sites are in the Puget Sound area and the other three are in rural central Washington.

Part I: Assessing Mission Fulfillment
Central Washington University (CWU) is undertaking substantial efforts to collect information regarding mission fulfillment. Several areas relevant to Standard Four – Effectiveness and Improvement, are mentioned below:
   a) The institution has established and is operating the capability to systematically collect, analyze and report meaningful, assessable, and verifiable data (Standard 4.A.1) that will support an effective system of evaluation of its programs and services to evaluate achievement of its
program goals and intended outcomes (Standard 4.A.2) through establishment of

- An Academic Assessment and Review Team,
- An Office of Organizational Effectiveness,
- A Strategic Planning Office, and
- Data collection, reporting, and evaluation capabilities within the CWU Campus Life Student Success unit and University Libraries to collect and evaluate relevant institutional data.

b) Regarding academic assessment, 100% of programs are now submitting academic assessment reports. It is a strength that faculty are actively engaged in in evaluating student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes (Standard 4.A.2). It also is a strength of this effort that these reports are regularly posted to CWU’s web pages, being made available to constituencies in a timely manner (Standard 4.B.2) and are also evaluated by the University Administration against a standard rubric, with feedback provided to the units, indicating that there are regular reviews of its assessment processes (Standard 4.A.6). However, there are needs to:

- In some programs, improve stated learning outcomes and indicators to make them measurable, and

- To collect and evaluate more information that directly and objectively evaluates student learning, using instruments appropriate to each discipline. Examples of such objective measures could include pre-test, post-test, rating of completed student work against rubrics and collective evaluation of these results at a course or program level, evaluation of collective student performance on standard embedded examination questions, competency-based student performance evaluations in final examinations or evaluations, and evaluation of student performance, by category on standardized externally administered examinations, and

- Strategically evaluate how to assess learning objectives outcomes on a regular basis, as current practices in some units to assess selected outcomes each year, will make it difficult to complete regular and systematic evaluations of data (Standard 4.A.3) and

- Use the results of these assessments of student learning to inform academic and learning support planning and practices to enhance student learning achievements (Standard 4.B.2)

c) Strategic planning and institutional assessment reports are based on meaningful institutionally identified indicators of achievement used for improvement by informing planning and decision making, and prepared and distributed in a timely manner (Standard 4.B.1).

d) However, on-campus interviews showed that CWU is still in the very beginning or initial stages of evaluating collected operational data and holistically integrating these operational data with other institutional data.
(such as student retention progression, graduation, completion, time to degree, job and graduate school placement alumni and employer feedback) into strategic long-term multiyear analyses to determine if its programs and services and resources and capacity are supporting accomplishment of core theme objectives and attainment of mission. (Standards 4.A.4 and 4.A.5).

**Part II: Operational Examples**

Central Washington University provided two operational examples in its Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report, both related to its Core Theme 1: Teaching and Learning: (1) Online Learning and (2) Student Success Unit Creation and Operation.

**Online Learning.** CWU’s Online Education unit is experiencing rapid enrollment growth. Sixty percent of summer session enrollment is now online. The unit has established a wide array of data collection practices to assess effectiveness. Three of the five reported types of data collections, Outcomes Achievement, Retention, and Student Engagement and Support Services, are aligned with Core Theme 1 Outcomes and Indicators. Additional data collections are taking place, including Course Review, where course materials and practices are rated against a Quality Assurance in Online Learning rubric, and comparison of online courses to face to face courses using data available form CWU's Student Evaluations of Instruction (SEOI). Two cycles of data collection and change implementation have been completed in 2011 and 2013. Additional efforts are now underway to incorporate course learning outcomes assessment into Online Education’s grade assessment forms, and to generate information about online programs’ retention and graduation rates to inform CWU’s strategic planning efforts. Although there was a reporting gap in 2012, online education reports were generated in 2011 and 2013 and will be generated annually in 2014 and in subsequent years.

Online Education’s efforts to collect and report information to faculty, in light of enrollment growth are laudable. There is a need to provide additional information to faculty through design of instruments and collection of data that directly and objectively measure student learning, so that the quality of student learning in terms of the collective attainment of an outcome at a satisfactory level can be evaluated for online courses and compared to face-to-face instruction.

**Student Success Unit Creation and Operation.** CWU reorganized its Academic and Student Life Division (ASL) and created a Student Success Unit in 2011 to assess entering students skills, abilities and needs, improve student support, enhance co-curricular and extra-curricular learning and living experiences and, as a result enhance student retention and engagement. The Student Success Unit established a set of co-curricular learning outcomes and developed data collection processes to evaluate attainment of the co-curricular outcomes, as well as Core Theme 1 objectives and outcomes associated with persistence, engagement, and the need for
and effectiveness of support services. ASL has collected and evaluated data in 2011 that showed a need to improve first-year persistence and retention, six-year graduation rate, improve engagement levels for first year students, and improve delivery of tutoring and supplemental instruction services in math and writing. Actions taken included establishment of an Academic and Research Commons (ARC) in the Brooks Library that provided math and English tutoring and research assignment support, increases in academic advising and reorganization of several centers that provide programming and co-curricular experiences for students, and development of new student communications capabilities through a commercial software program called MAP-Works®.

Oral interviews revealed that (1) use of MAP-works, along with other data analytics tools permitted earlier identification of individual student issues associated with campus life and communications with affected students, and (2) results of the pilot data effort about the ARC’s student support efforts positively affected student performance as measured by grades awarded in English 101 and also positively affected student self-assessments of ability to perform academic research and competency in academic writing.

Oral interviews revealed that ASL’s programmatic revisions and data collection efforts are ongoing, that ARC is continuing its student tutoring and research support efforts, and is planning a second pilot course integration, this time with English 102. In terms of evaluating the impact of ASL’s and ARC’s efforts on attainment of institutional mission, reports of ASL’s and ARC’s efforts are discussed at the Deans’ Council level. It was not possible to determine if formal integration with information from other units in narrative reports to the Provost’s Council and above are currently being performed. However, conversations with Strategic Planning and Organizational Effectiveness units indicated that high-level integration and reporting across all units, combining information from Program Review, Academic Assessment, and Academic and Student Life evaluations, were planned but were still in initial stages of development.

**Part III: Moving Forward**

Overall, CWU’s readiness to assess mission fulfillment is mixed. Substantial amounts of data collection and reporting are taking place. To move forward, some collected data, such as increased adoption of objective assessments of student learning, could be improved, and the institution needs to step up its efforts to generate reports and qualitative narratives that integrate evaluations of collected data across all units (academic, campus life, budgeting and resource allocation) and permit evaluation of progress towards attainment of mission as measured by Core Theme indicators. In areas where mission fulfillment has not been accomplished, recommendations could be made to implement institution-wide changes that improve progress towards mission fulfillment.
A hypothetical working example of this approach could be in the complex area of retention, persistence, progression, and graduation rate. Many factors, including student learning as demonstrated by attainment of learning outcomes, student learning support, such as tutoring and library services, allocation of resources affecting scheduling and staffing of classes, and experiences in student housing and with student life in general, among others, all interact to affect student retention, persistence, progression, and graduation. As is already well-understood at CWU, a holistic “big picture” approach that integrates data streams; reports; and faculty, staff, and student input across all units is needed to determine what improvements are needed (and might be effective) to improve learning, retention, progression, and completion.

Additionally, data collections, reports, recommendations, and resource development and allocations that occur as part of Core Theme 5 – Resource Development and Stewardship, should be directly connected to recommendations for program improvements and resource allocations that come to light as a result of evaluations and recommendations made under Core Theme 1 – Teaching and Learning, Core Theme 2 – Inclusiveness and Diversity, Core Theme 3 – Scholarship and Creative Expression, and Core Theme 4 – Public Service and Community Engagement. If this integration were to be done, CWU’s resource recommendations, plans, allocations, and, finally, operations would be fully integrated with and support CWU’s attainment of mission as part of Core Themes 1 through 4.

**Conclusion**

Overall the evaluators believe that Central Washington University has made progress in many areas since the Year One evaluation in October 2011. Availability of data has improved dramatically; participation in assessment has increased to the 100 percent mark; strategic planning has become a more central part of the work of the University, with every entity having created a plan of some sort; the University is clear about its mission and seeks to achieve it without engaging in expensive and wasteful mission creep; and important institutional positions such as a strategic planning coordinator, organizational effectiveness coordinator, and an academic assessment and review team have been filled. The evaluators are very impressed with the progress made and the initiatives started.

To the extent that the evaluators are concerned, it is that CWU must act quickly, uniformly, and with focused diligence to integrate its organizational effectiveness, academic assessment, and strategic planning efforts so that it is able to holistically evaluate both all integrated collected data and the actions taken in response to evaluated data to determine if it is attaining its mission. This integrated effort should come to fruition prior to the deadlines for submission of the Year Seven comprehensive report and subsequent visit, which will be coming up in about two
years. And, to complicate matters this must all be done in a period of declining state support for higher education. As of the writing of this report CWU faces a $9.5 million budget gap, has eliminated 20 programs, and is reviewing 35 more for possible elimination. Carrying out this accreditation effort will be difficult but the evaluators are optimistic that it can be achieved by the dedicated professionals at Central Washington University.