

Year One Peer-Evaluation Report

Central Washington University

Ellensburg, Washington

October 12, 2011

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

Table of Contents

I. Evaluators 3

II. Introduction 4

III. Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials..... 5

IV. Topics addressed as an addendum to the Self-Evaluation Report 5

V. Eligibility Requirements 6

VI. Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations 7

 Standard 1.A Mission 7

 Standard 1.B Core Themes..... 7

VII. Summary 8

VIII. Commendations and Recommendations 8

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Introduction

On behalf of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the Evaluation Committee conducted a review of the Year One Report of Central Washington University. The committee reviewed the September 2011 Year One Self-Evaluation Report and the October 2009 Comprehensive Evaluation Committee Report.

Central Washington University (CWU) is one of Washington's three regional comprehensive universities. By state statute, *"The primary purposes of the regional universities shall be 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."*

This purpose is fulfilled through CWU's main campus in Ellensburg, Washington and other teaching sites, five sites in the densely populated Puget Sound area and three sites in rural central Washington. CWU offers degrees primarily in business and accounting, teacher preparation, electrical and industrial technology, and social and behavioral sciences. Total university enrollment in the 2010-2011 academic year was at 11,614 students, 95 percent of whom were undergraduates.

Assessment of the Institution's Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The CWU Year One Self-Evaluation Report was prepared using the 2010 standards of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. The Self-Evaluation Report addressed eligibility requirements 2 and 3 and Standard One: Mission, Core Themes and Expectations. The report was provided to the evaluation committee members in the timeline identified by the Commission in both paper and electronic forms.

The report was clearly written, and the information presented appeared to be accurate and complete, addressed eligibility requirements and each component of Standard One, and provided the information needed by the evaluation committee to complete its review.

Topics Addressed as an Addendum to the Self-Evaluation Report

A Comprehensive Evaluation Report from October 2009 was included as an addendum to the September 2011 Year One Self-Evaluation Report. The Comprehensive Evaluation Report addressed three January 2010 Northwest Commission recommendations.

Prior Recommendation #1

The Committee recommends that CWU more thoroughly and consistently implement its assessment plan to ensure the cycle of review is completed and that modifications based upon feedback mechanisms lead to improvement in teaching and learning. These efforts will be especially applicable to the general education program (Standard 2.B).

CWU continues to make significant improvements in its planning and assessment of learning outcomes. Annual documentation of programmatic student learning outcome achievements is at 93 percent of undergraduate programs and 83 percent for graduate programs. Comparisons of 370 programmatic outcome assessments show that 84 percent report students are meeting and/or exceeding stated outcome mastery/criterion levels. The CWU assessment system also shows strong evidence of improved levels of pedagogical and/or curricular changes resulting from the assessment process.

Since the 2009 comprehensive evaluation, CWU has developed and implemented a General Education Goals Assessment Framework to address shortcomings in the assessment of its general education process. Degree programs undergo a comprehensive self-study and program review on a five-year cycle. The program review process is both descriptive and evaluative in nature, and includes input from students, faculty, and an external visitor.

On the whole, CWU appears to have made significant progress in strengthening its assessment process and using assessment results to improve teaching and learning. It is important that CWU continue to make progress in the number of programs participating in annual reporting of student learning achievements, particularly at the graduate level (Standard 2.C.2).

Recommendation #2

The Evaluation Committee recommends that Central Washington University coordinate its budgeting, planning, and evaluation processes in a systematic and clearly defined manner that is effectively communicated to all stakeholders. These efforts are necessary to help identify institutional priorities for resource allocation in a period of financial uncertainty (Standards 1.B.4 and 1.B.5).

CWU has taken major strides toward improving its budget, planning, and evaluation processes. It has expanded participation in the annual budget process, which now includes Board of Trustee, senior leadership, faculty and staff participation in planning and allocating financial resources in alignment with institutional priorities and mission-critical functions.

CWU has also broadened participation through the use of a new Budget and Finance Committee, with representation from faculty, staff, and students. A Management Information Systems Team (MIST) has been formed to better integrate systems and strengthen forecasting, budgeting, and resource allocation processes. An Office of Institutional Effectiveness has also been formed to better plan institutional effectiveness and assessment activities. Sixteen task forces have been formed to enhance institutional effectiveness, assessment, and planning initiatives.

Communication among various constituencies has been improved through a series of periodic budget forums, making Board of Trustee meetings more available through in-person attendance and internet streaming, an annual State of the University Address by the President, a News and Briefing Room blog, and a series of monthly, televised institutional video addresses.

CWU has successfully addressed the issues surrounding budgeting, planning and evaluation processes raised in the last review. Central Washington University has significantly strengthened its coordination of planning, allocating, budgeting, and monitoring its institutional resources. It has also developed a robust approach for enlarging participation in these decisions and communicating with a wide range of institutional constituencies (Standard 2.F.2 and Standard 2.F.3).

Recommendation #3

The Evaluation Committee recommends that Central Washington University enhance its overall capacity for institutional research to define and analyze data in a consistent and systematic manner for sharing with all its constituencies in order to support effective and timely decision-making (Standard 6.C.7).

CWU has enhanced its capacity for institutional research by creating the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and a Management Information Systems Team (MIST). CWU is in the process of developing a dashboard of key indicators and implementing a monthly reporting process. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is in the process of strengthening data collection and reporting processes and widening access to reports. The recommendation has been successfully addressed.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility Requirements 2 and 3 were addressed in the report. Based on the information provided, Central Washington University meets these eligibility requirements.

Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

Standard 1.A Mission

The mission of Central Washington University is as follows:

The mission of Central Washington University is to prepare students for enlightened, responsible, and productive lives; to produce research, scholarship, and creative expressions in the public interest; and to serve as a resource to the region and the state through effective stewardship of university resources.

The mission statement has been approved by the Board of Trustees, articulates a purpose appropriate for a regional university, provides direction for strategic planning and other institutional efforts, and has been widely communicated to the university community.

Based on the self-evaluation provided, CWU has developed a focused and integrated approach to identifying, linking and articulating its mission, core themes, objectives, and a wide range of indicators that can be used to assess the institution's effectiveness and extent of mission fulfillment.

Standard 1.B Core Themes

Five core themes reflect the mission of CWU: effective teaching and student learning, inclusiveness and diversity, scholarship and creative expression, public service and community engagement, and resource development and stewardship. These core themes serve as the foundation for all institutional level outcomes at CWU. Central Washington University has a plan in place to review all core themes annually with an in-depth review of one core theme each year, beginning with an in-depth review of teaching and learning planned for the 2012-13 academic year.

Core Theme 1: Teaching and Learning

CWU has identified student success as its highest priority and the achievement of programmatic learning outcomes as the primary measure of achievement of student success. Two objectives have been established surrounding teaching and learning, along with five outcomes and a total of 12 indicators of achievement of these outcomes. The indicators associated with this core theme appear to provide a comprehensive set of measures for assessing outcome achievement.

Core Theme 2: Inclusiveness and Diversity

CWU is committed to provide a diverse and inclusive working and learning environment based on principles of respect, support and encouragement. CWU has identified three objectives for inclusiveness and diversity at the institution, eight outcomes, and 13 indicators. The outcomes and indicators appear to provide adequate measures for assessing attainment of identified objectives surrounding inclusiveness and diversity.

Core Theme 3: Scholarship and Creative Expression

CWU defines this core theme as a commitment to the creation, dissemination and preservation of knowledge through research, scholarship, and creative expression. Two objectives, three outcomes and three indicators have been established for scholarship and creative expression. The measures focus primarily on the number of publications, performances, presentation, courses, grants and awards. There do not appear to be measures of the quality of research, scholarship, and creative expression.

Core Theme 4: Public Service and Community Engagement

This core theme is integral to CWU's purpose as a publicly funded institution of higher education and includes a wide range of partnerships and activities that link the university to the communities that it serves. CWU has established three objectives, three outcomes and four indicators in the area of public service and engagement. The objectives, outcomes and indicators appear to provide the measures necessary to appropriately assess institutional achievement for this core theme.

Core Theme 5: Resource Development and Stewardship

This core theme reflects the need for CWU to become less reliant on state financial support, which has significantly declined during recent years. CWU has identified a need to generate revenues through core operations and auxiliary functions, embrace entrepreneurial attitudes and systems, and do a better job of forecasting revenues and expenses. CWU has identified six objectives, 11 outcomes, and 15 indicators for resource development and stewardship, which appear to provide a comprehensive set of measurements for this core theme.

Summary

Central Washington University has an approved mission statement that identifies five core themes. The university has identified objectives, outcomes and indicators of achievement for each of the core themes and has established an assessment system to measure its achievements in these areas and to address the extent of mission fulfillment.

Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations

1. Central Washington University is to be commended for significantly strengthening its coordination of planning, allocating, budgeting, and monitoring of its institutional resources. It has developed a robust approach for enlarging participation in these decisions and communicating with a wide range of institutional constituencies (Standard 2.F.2 and Standard 2.F.3).
2. Central Washington University is to be commended for developing a highly integrated, well focused, and tightly linked set of core themes, objectives, outcomes and indicators to guide and measure its efforts to accomplish its mission (Standard 1.B.1 and Standard 1.B.2).

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that CWU continue to make improvements in the percentage of programs participating in annual reporting of student learning achievements, particularly at the graduate level (Standard 2.C.2).
2. It is recommended that CWU include indicators of quality and impact of research and creative expression activities effectively assess Core Theme 3, scholarship and creative expression (Standard 1.B) and mission fulfillment.