

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A REGULAR INTERIM REPORT

North Idaho College
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

April 17-18, 2008

Prepared by

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A Confidential Report Prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities that Represents the Views of the Evaluator

Introduction

North Idaho College (NIC) is located in the midst of the recreational and scenic North Idaho region with the 45-acre main campus at Coeur d'Alene. North Idaho College is nestled between forested mountains and an abundance of scenic rivers and lakes. NIC enrolls approximately 4,650 students in its academic programs and totaled 10,115 course enrollments in various non-credit courses in 2006-07. NIC serves five counties in the Idaho panhandle—Kootenai, Benewah, Bonner, Shoshone, and Boundary.

Recent Accreditation History

North Idaho College's accreditation status was reaffirmed in April 2003 by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). In reaffirming the accreditation status in 2003, NWCCU had six commendations and three recommendations in the Full-Scale Evaluation report. The three recommendations are listed below:

Recommendation #1: Planning and Assessment

The College has made planning and assessment a high priority. A number of planning activities are underway across the campus. Faculty and staff are involved with, and supportive of, the process. There is evidence to support that planning and assessment lead to resource allocation. On the college level, a strategic plan has been developed that describes the college's vision, mission, values, as well as key initiatives. Outcomes have been identified and included in programs/courses.

It was unclear to evaluators how the various planning and assessment efforts are interrelated. Also unclear are the process and indicators that enable the institution to determine the level of goal achievement.

The committee recommends that the college clarify the interrelationship of the multi-tiered planning processes, and clarify the alignment of its assessment strategies to those planning processes in order to systematically determine in what ways, and to what degree, it is accomplishing its mission and goals. It is further recommended that the institution strengthen its process for using assessment results for continuous improvement. (1.B.1)

Recommendation #2: Educational Assessment

The college has made significant progress in evaluating the effectiveness of its educational programs. Program Reviews are regularly conducted for all educational programs. The data collected is consistent, valuable, and standardized. Student performance outcomes have been identified and included in programs and courses. However, the college is encouraged to pursue assessment tools to effectively and consistently assess student-learning outcomes and general educational abilities to improve the teaching-learning process across programs and divisions. (Policy 2.1)

Recommendation #3: Financial Planning:

The college does not prepare a minimum three-year projection of operating income and expenditures as required by Standard 7.A.2. It is recommended that the college

planning process included a minimum of a three year projection of income, and expenditures, in order to comply with this Standard. (7.A.2)

The college was asked to submit a progress report in spring 2005 which was accepted by the commission in July 2005. This progress report addressed the improvements made by North Idaho College in responding to the three recommendations.

Regular Interim Report and Evaluation Visit

The evaluation visit on April 17-18, 2008, lasted a day and a half, during which the evaluators conducted interviews and reviewed evidence organized by the college. The college had the evidence documents easily accessible in the resource room that was made available to the evaluators. The evaluators had meetings with the President; Vice Presidents for Instruction, Student Services, and Administrative Services; Board Members, Department Chairs of general education areas and career technical areas; Student Services Directors; Faculty from different general education and career technical areas; Faculty, Classified, and Student leadership; Students. In addition the evaluators had an open meeting to which the entire campus community was invited.

The interviews helped the evaluators verify the regular interim report as well as confirm whether the perception of faculty, staff, and administrators were consistent with the written report. In addition, the documents provided by the interviewees and those in the evidence folders were extremely useful in validating the report.

Based on the documentation and interviews, the current evaluators concluded that the recommendations from the full-scale evaluation visit in 2003 have been, and continue to be, adequately addressed and integrated into the ongoing operations of the college.

Part A is a review of all the actions taken in regard to the three recommendations from the full-scale evaluation visit in April 2003. Part B addresses the changes that have taken place within the organization's functional and logistical operations related to the Commission's standards one through nine.

Part A: Actions taken regarding recommendations

This section is a review of the work North Idaho College's staff, faculty and administration have accomplished to document the college's response to recommendations from the last full-scale evaluation visit and the subsequent follow-up focused interim visit. A total of three recommendations are addressed in this section:

Recommendation #1: Planning and Assessment

The College has made planning and assessment a high priority. A number of planning activities are underway across the campus. Faculty and staff are involved with, and supportive of, the process. There is evidence to support that planning and assessment lead to resource allocation. On the college level, a strategic plan has been developed that describes the college's vision, mission, values, as well as key initiatives. Outcomes have been identified and included in programs/courses.

It was unclear to evaluators how the various planning and assessment efforts are interrelated. Also unclear are the process and indicators that enable the institution to determine the level of goal achievement.

The committee recommends that the college clarify the interrelationship of the multi-tiered planning processes, and clarify the alignment of its assessment strategies to those planning processes in order to systematically determine in what ways, and to what degree, it is accomplishing its mission and goals. It is further recommended that the institution strengthen its process for using assessment results for continuous improvement. (1.B.1)

NIC has made significant progress in clarifying the relationship between the strategic planning process and the departmental planning process as well as in "closing the loop" on how well it is accomplishing its mission and goals. The five year regular interim report also recognizes that there is still work to be done with the following statement:

"The College still has work to do to fulfill Recommendation One. As the new five-year plan is developed, the assessment strategies for the strategic goals should be built into the action plans, as should the strategy for how to use the assessments results for continuous improvement."

After reviewing the evidence, and from the interviews, it was clear to the evaluators that the college has been systematically attempting to integrate the departmental planning processes with assessment of the effectiveness of the plans and initiatives on achieving the mission and goals of the college and the different areas. Individual departments use a three-point framework to develop their departmental plans: 1) the institutional strategic goals; 2) the annual goals of their respective vice presidents; and 3) the on-going activities related to their department mission or function. The three vice presidents then prioritize the different initiatives within their areas, which then feeds into the discussions at the President's cabinet where the final list of initiatives are identified for funding. It

should be noted that there are many initiatives that do not require “new” funding from the college and the departments just implement those initiatives.

The Enrollment Management Committee has several initiatives that demonstrated the link the institutional planning and “closing the loop” efforts. For example, the Enrollment Management Committee’s initiative on improving student retention and recruitment by developing a faculty advisor model has already been implemented. A second initiative for a portal system has been funded for the 08-09 year.

The evaluators propose that the College continue on its path of tightening the relationship between the College’s strategic plan and the departmental plans, and that it continue to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of its planning process on how well it is accomplishing its mission and goals.

Recommendation #2: Educational Assessment

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Between 2003 and 2006, the College first focused its efforts on institutional assessment surveys with students (Student Opinion Survey) and an employee satisfaction survey (PACE). During this time, the English Department started work on developing a process and tools for assessing writing skills. With the addition of a new vice president of instruction in fall 2006, the outcomes assessment efforts took a new direction. A faculty member was given release time (80%) to be the coordinator of student learning outcomes. A Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee was formed to be the instructional resource and to help promote outcomes assessment across courses, divisions and programs. The evaluators found members of this committee to be passionate about their charge to cultivate a culture of assessment across the institution. This focus continued even after the resignation in the vice president position in summer of 2007 and with an interim vice president since then.

NIC has defined their general education outcomes to cover nine abilities. They have been in place for quite some time. They include:

Critical/Creative Thinking and Problem Solving; Communication; Mathematical and Scientific Reasoning; Historical, Cultural, Environmental and Global Awareness; Aesthetic Response; Social Responsibility / Citizenship; Information Literacy; Value / Ethical Reasoning and Wellness.

As noted in the 2003 evaluator’s report, the College has made exemplary progress in identifying and publishing student learning outcomes. This progress has been enhanced

this past year through the use of technology (Web Driver) that makes it easier to maintain consistency of syllabi / outcomes across courses and programs. While not all departments use this technology, it is exciting to see it being adopted through a faculty driven strategy. This is one example of where faculty are attempting to create consistency within courses and departments.

What was lacking at the last accreditation visit was the utilization of assessment tools to assess general education outcomes and then to use that information to improve teaching and student learning. Through interviews with faculty and department chairs, the evaluators found varying levels of engagement in assessment. This was verified through a year by year comparison of programs as shown in the Institution's Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (SLOA) notebook.

The most notable success of assessment impacting teaching and learning has occurred within the English Department. Their work in the ENG 102 course is an outstanding example of why and how programs conduct assessment and how the loop is closed to improve teaching and student learning. Members of the SLOA committee are hoping to use this model across the college as it appears to be well accepted. The evaluators commend the work of the English department in their assessment process, particularly on the changes implemented to teaching and learning as a result of assessment.

Other examples of work being conducted in assessment include the Communication Department's development of rubrics. They recently added a point system to their rubrics and are preparing to collect data on student performance in Fall 2008. The Mathematics Department has developed common test questions and finals for some courses. The Librarians and the English Department have begun research on assessing information literacy.

Although many departments have embraced the assessment process, this is not consistent across the institution. While the college has identified the general education outcomes through the general education abilities, given the varying levels of engagement in assessment across programs and departments, progress needs to be made on regularly and systematically assessing those outcomes to assure that students who complete these programs explicitly demonstrate that they have achieved these outcomes. (2.B.2) Further, there is no consistent documentation that assessment activities lead to improvement of teaching and learning (2.B.3)

Recommendation #3: Financial Planning:

The college does not prepare a minimum three-year projection of operating income and expenditures as required by Standard 7.A.2. It is recommended that the college planning process included a minimum of a three year projection of income, and expenditures, in order to comply with this Standard. (7.A.2)

In response to this recommendation, the college now prepares a minimum three-year projection of operating income and expenditures as required by Standard 7.A.2.

Part B: Institutional changes since the regular evaluation and the focused visit.

Standard One: Institutional Mission and Goals, Planning and Effectiveness

NIC has undergone significant executive-level personnel changes, and nowhere is this more felt than in the office of the vice president for instruction. Since December 2005, it has been filled at an interim level except between August 2006 and June 2007. There have been other changes as well: in the office of the president; a new vice president for student services; and two new deans, along with changes in areas of responsibility.

The strategic planning process currently underway will be completed in May 2008. The new five-year plan will set the goals, action items, and measurable outcomes for 2008-2013. The plan, along with the expected hiring of a permanent vice president for instruction, will provide direction for the college as it works towards its mission.

Standard Two: Educational Program and its Effectiveness

The programs at NIC are determined by the Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of Applied Science degrees and a variety of technical certificates. Since 2003, new AAS degrees have been offered in Radiography Technology, Human Resource Assistant and Resource / Recreation Management. New Technical Certificates have been offered in Accounting Assistant, Landscape Technology, Outdoor Power / Recreational Vehicle Repair, Welding Technology, Computer Information Technology, Law Enforcement. Advanced Technical Certificates are offered in Accounting Assistant and Computer Information Technology. The Electronics Technology AAS degree and certificate was terminated in 2005 as was the Landscape Technology certificate in 2007.

The 2003 report was concerned about a training program offered in the People's Republic of China through the College's Workforce Development Division. It was unclear how that program supported the mission and goals of the College. That program has since been discontinued.

All programs that result in an AAS degree or a professional technical certificate have identified outcomes in a consistent manner. The evaluators applaud the institution for achieving this result. It appeared to the evaluators that those programs with national exams and industry certification appeared to be further along in assessment than those PT programs without the national exams or industry certification.

Because professional technical programs are competency based, their assessment activities are further along than the general education areas. There is no consistent documentation of closing the loop and making educational improvements in their programs although there are many ad hoc examples of program improvements initiated due to assessment. The evaluators suggest that the institution address the consistency of documenting through evidence that assessment activities lead to the improvement of teaching and learning (2.B.3)

The assessment of General Education Outcomes is discussed under Recommendation 2.

The following concern was raised in the 2003 Evaluation Report: "The Committee recommends that the College clearly identify the required related instruction components for all certificate

programs over 30 credit hours in length.” These evaluators did find confusion about related instruction in a few certificates, especially in the area of human relations. The confusion occurred in two different ways: First, it was not clear in some certificates where human relations occurred. Second, there was an extensive list of courses meeting the human relations component so it was not clear how ‘human relations’ was defined and how courses were then selected to meet that definition.

Standard Three: Students

Student Services departments at NIC work together like an integrated unit and evaluate the effectiveness of student services programs and initiatives; the departments use the results of the evaluation as a basis for change. In addition, the newly formed Enrollment Management Team is focused on using data for planning and evaluation processes. The evaluators found that the leadership provided by the new Vice President for Student Services has been significant in the streamlining of services corresponding to the mission and goals of the college as well as student services. Student Services staff are commended for their integrated approach of providing services and their commitment to improving systems of the college to enhance support services for the students.

Over the last five years there have been several changes in the various Student Services departments. A few are highlighted below:

Admissions and Registrar: The new student information management system, Datatel, has been implemented and is being used to improve information availability for planning as well as improving efficiency and communication systems. By moving to this integrated information system, data are now more easily shared between offices which leads to greater effectiveness and efficiency. A new recruiter position supports the institutional priority of student recruitment, while two other positions, application specialist and admissions technical specialist, support the infrastructure. Using Datatel, systems and processes have been streamlined and the core functions of the admissions and registrar units have been aligned.

Advising and Placement, and Career Services: Advising and Placement has been restructured to include the support services provided to professional technical students as well as to create the Lead Faculty Advisor (LFA) program. On-campus placement testing has been centralized in a new testing center. Career Services has become a core part of admissions, registration and orientation.

Orientation: The New Student Orientation (NSO) program has been revamped by making it mandatory for all first-time degree seeking students, with the student orientation leaders and faculty/staff advisors now playing a central role.

Financial Aid: The basic functions and policies of the Financial Aid office have not changed; however, there have been improvements in the scholarship process, improvements in providing seminars on financial literacy for students who accept loans, and improvements in managing the institutional loan default rate.

Health Services, Counseling, and Center for New Directions: The consolidation of these three units under a single manager has resulted in streamlining of services provided to students.

Disability: Since the last Accreditation Report, the name of this department has been changed from “*Disability Support Services*” to “*Center for Educational Access*” in an effort to put the focus on “*providing access*” to individuals eligible to receive accommodations. The Center for Educational Access continues to expand, serving more students with more staff, providing more assistive technology and curriculum.

Professional Technical Student Support Services and Educational Opportunity Center: The different functions of these two programs have been absorbed by other units—Advising, Career Services Center, other Student Services departments where feasible.

Multicultural Affairs, Auxiliary Services, Student Activities, and Athletics: NIC has made changes in these areas. Two of the far-reaching changes include: appointing eighteen staff members to assist with the implementation of the agreement with the Coeur d’Alene Tribe; and discontinuation of athletics from the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges (NWAACC), and retention of affiliation with the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). The Athletics Advisory Committee, which was established as a sounding body to the Athletic Director, has not met in over two years. However, this did not come up as a significant issue in the meetings that the evaluators had during the visit. All the changes have correspondingly shifted the allocation of internal resources, which the college has successfully managed. Most of the auxiliary services are profitable enterprises, with challenges not unlike these services at other colleges and universities.

Standard Four: Faculty

The College has restructured instructional administration by adding a Dean for General Studies and a Dean for Professional Technical Education under the Vice President of Instruction. The College also just hired a new Vice President of Instruction scheduled to start July 1, 2008.

Full and part-time salaries have increased over the past five years at an average of 2% per year. Health Insurance is now available from two different carriers providing more options for employees of the College.

The faculty are actively engaged in the governance at NIC as shown by a long history of collaboration. Interviews with faculty showed a concern brought about in part by the administrative turnover the past few years combined with recent discussions around participation in, and the timing allowed for, policy and procedure items of governance.

The following concern was raised in the 2003 Evaluation Report: “The Committee recommends that the Human Resource Department work with divisions to establish a clear and consistent adjunct evaluation tool, to formalize procedures across campus and to develop a centralized location for maintaining adjunct records.” The evaluators found a clear policy describing two indices (student evaluations and Division Chair observations) and the scheduling of those evaluations for both full-time and adjunct faculty. In conversations with faculty and Department Chairs, it appears there is a standard classroom evaluation form for all faculty and that the policy

for faculty evaluation is being carried out. However, the College does not have a process that verifies whether classroom evaluations are in fact conducted. A review of adjunct files found files lacking evaluation documents, either student evaluations or administrative reviews. It is also noted that written evaluation paperwork is still stored in a variety of locations rather than being centralized.

The College has moved to an online student evaluation tool where all courses are evaluated every term. Concerns were voiced by both faculty and administration about the low response rate to those evaluations. It was not clear to the evaluators where online evaluations are stored or how they are accessed.

The evaluators suggest the College continue to work at finding a centralized location for storage and access of all faculty employment and evaluation records as well as ensure that the evaluation files are complete with all relevant documents.

Standard Five: Library and Information Resources

In the 2003 Evaluation Report, the following concern was raised: "It is suggested that the Library strengthen its assessment processes through a formal systematic assessment of library services and resources to complement informal and external assessment of library services." A survey was conducted in 2005 regarding the collection and library services had a 33% response rate. It was not clear how results of this assessment had been used to close the loop and improve library services. The College will move to an email system in the fall of 2008 where all students will have an NIC email address. At that time, the Library plans to implement a student assessment process using the new email system.

The Librarians felt there was generous funding for a variety of resources, and they felt the Library has gained a reputation as an excellent resource for NIC students and students at the nearby universities as well.

Comments in the previous report led to concerns over adequate staffing. Interviews conducted during this visit no longer reflected that concern. The staffs of the Library and Instructional Media Services have worked at forming support teams that have improved service delivery throughout the institution. An example is the Tech Fit team that brought together staff from Media, the Physical Plant, Distance Education and the Instructional Technology Committee. This team worked collaboratively in solving media and technology needs in the new science building as well as in meeting the needs of the new remote college centers. This collaboration appears to be at the heart of how NIC works in its daily operations across the institution. In addition, they now have central automation and monitoring of all the AV equipment on campus allowing them to assist and problem solve for faculty using the material even at the remote locations.

Standard Six: Governance and Administration

The college has experienced significant turnover of senior executives: the president, vice president for student services, and the director of human resources are all new hires, and there is an interim vice president for instruction to replace the vice president who resigned after a vote of no-confidence from the faculty. These are critical personnel changes in a short span; however, the evaluators find that these changes have not affected the successful administration of the

college. It is noteworthy that the faculty and staff at NIC have been unwavering in their commitment to student success even during the challenging times of transition of senior administrators. Finally, NIC's Board of Trustees recently directed the college attorney to review all college and board policies, and that process is underway.

Standard Seven: Finance

Since the last accreditation visit, NIC's financial management has significantly improved with the hiring of a new Controller. The college continues to be financially stable, and also prepares a minimum three-year projection of operating income and expenditures as required by Standard 7.A.2. The college is also closely following the various parameters that could significantly affect its financial conditions: in particular, the allocation of the state's general fund among NIC, College of Southern Idaho, and College of Western Idaho, and the effects of local property valuation and taxes. Recognizing the importance of additional revenue sources, since the last accreditation, NIC has included the Director of Development as a member of the president's cabinet, which should enhance fundraising efforts.

Standard Eight: Physical Resources

The previous visit found no concerns with facilities. Since 2003 the most significant changes include the opening of the Meyer Health Sciences building. This building now contains the science, math and nursing departments. It has had a tremendous impact as a physical resource; interviews with faculty showed a renewed enthusiasm and collaboration between faculty across departments now that they are in the same building. There currently are no funds available for the necessary major remodel needed for Seiter Hall where these programs were once housed. Those funds have been requested from the State. The building is being used by other departments.

Three new outreach centers were opened in Ponderay, Kellogg and Bonners Ferry. Interviews with faculty and administration found these centers to be well received and a positive connection to the outlying communities. While the financial resources were available for opening these facilities, there were concerns that the regular maintenance of these facilities causes a draw on other maintenance needs at the main campus because operational maintenance was not budgeted for these centers. Consequently, funds and resources come out of the maintenance budget for the main campus.

Standard Nine: Institutional Integrity

There have been regular updates to campus policy and procedure, and institutional procedures are regularly being followed. With the hiring of a president in fall 2007, the Board of Trustees and the administration have initiated the process of updating the college's Policy Manual. Also, after a gap, the college prepared an annual report to the community in September 2007. This report was also made available on the college website, which has undergone a complete redesign.

General Commendations and Recommendations:

Commendation:

1. Student Services staff are commended for their integrated approach of providing services and their commitment to improving systems of the college to enhance support services for the students.
2. The evaluators commend the employees, an active, spirited and engaged group, who are unwavering in their commitment to student success even during the challenging times of transition of senior administrators.
3. The evaluators commend the work of the English department in their assessment process, particularly on the changes implemented to teaching and learning as a result of assessment.

Recommendation:

1. The evaluators commend the college for identifying the general education outcomes through the general education abilities and making great progress over the last two years to assess these outcomes. However, the evaluators recommend that the institution still needs to focus on regularly and systematically assessing all general education outcomes to assure that students who complete programs explicitly demonstrate that they have achieved these outcomes. (2.B.2) Although the institution has examples of improvements in teaching and learning initiated due to results of assessment, this is not consistent and not well documented. The evaluators recommend that the institution provide evidence that its assessment activities lead to improvement of teaching and learning across all general education outcomes. (2.B.3)