

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A Focused Interim Report

Central Oregon Community College

Bend, Oregon

April 10, 2009

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

Central Oregon Community College (COCC) is a two-year institution that offers a variety of programs, including the Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer (AAOT) degree, the Associate of General Studies degree, the Associate of Science and Associate of Applied Science degree programs, Oregon Transfer Modules, as well as a range of Certificates in career and technical fields.

The most recent full-scale visit was conducted in April 2002. In June 2002, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) reaffirmed accreditation and requested a Focused Interim Report and Evaluation Visit in Spring 2004 to address the five general recommendations that were made in the April 2002 report. In June 2004, the NWCCU reaffirmed accreditation based on the Focused Interim Report and visit. The most recent evaluation visit, a regular interim visit, was conducted in April 2007.

The institution received one commendation and one recommendation related to assessment in the Regular Interim Report submitted in April 2007. That recommendation is the subject of this focused, one-day interim evaluation visit and report, conducted on April 10, 2009.

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Introduction

COCC's response to the Recommendation contained in the Regular Interim Report visit conducted in April 2007 is well-documented and thoroughly explained in the college report submitted to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (the "Commission") on March 1, 2009. During the visit, the evaluator found the supporting materials to be clear, in great quantity, and readily available from across the various college disciplines, departments, programs, and divisions. The College did an excellent job summarizing the history and current status of the efforts related to the Regular Interim Report's recommendation (below) and has provided good evidence to indicate substantial and satisfactory progress on the Recommendation. The report appendices, as well as material gathered and reviewed during the visit, provide a clear picture of the College's assessment activities, of the broad participation across the campus, and of the plans for ongoing quality improvement in the areas indicated by the Recommendation. In particular, the evaluator found evidence that the College has developed a meaningful culture of assessment that extends into courses, programs, and degrees, and that these assessment activities roll up into assessment of general education outcomes.

Evaluation Methods

To verify the contents of the College's report, the evaluator conducted research on three separate fronts: (a) reading and analyzing the "Focused Interim Report"; (b) examining the College's website, particularly its assessment web; and (c) extensive interviewing on the day of the site visit, coupled with analyzing numerous documents gathered that day and referred to again while preparing this report.

The reviewer spoke with the following individuals during the visit.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joyce Garrett, Trustee• Dr. James Middleton, President• Dr. Kathy Walsh, Vice President for Instruction• Matt McCoy, Vice President for Administration• Jim Jones, Vice President and Chief Financial Officer• Ron Paradis, College Relations• Alicia Moore, Dean of Student and Enrollment Services• Diana Glenn, Dean• Dr. Mary Jeanne Kuhar, Dean• Dr. Amy Harper, Associate Professor, Anthropology• Julie Hood, Associate Professor, Biology• Dr. Amy Howell, Assistant Professor II, Early Childhood Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Karen Huck, Professor, Speech & Communications (Fine Arts Chair)• Doug Nelson, Professor, Math• Dr. Michael Holtzclaw, Associate Professor, Geography (Social Science Chair)• Dr. Cora Agatucci, Professor, English Faculty (Humanities Chair)• Dr. Scott Hays, Associate Professor, Business (Business Chair)• Jim Ellis, Assistant Professor II, Business• Lynn Murray, Assistant Professor II, Dental Assisting• Michele Decker, Associate Professor, Nursing (Nursing Chair)• Beverlee Jackson, Associate Professor, HIT Faculty
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Analysis and evaluation

In April 2007, the “Regular Interim Report” identified several concerns. As a result of that visit, the Commission reaffirmed COCC’s accreditation but requested that the College prepare a Focused Interim Report that responded to a specific recommendation, with multiple parts, related to COCC’s assessment of student learning outcomes.

It is recommended that COCC continue to develop student learning outcomes at both the course and program level, determine the level of competency expected of students, assess how well students meet those expectations and make improvements to programs based upon the findings of the assessment process. This recommendation is made for both individual programmatic assessment and for the assessment of General Education. (Standard 2.B and Policy 2.2)

In 2007, the “Regular Interim Report” directed the College to extend the culture of assessment beyond the course level because “progress still has to be made in extending this culture of assessment into the levels of the program and degree” (p. 1). The 2007 evaluators also noted that assessment efforts were not evenly applied across the college’s departments and disciplines, citing as one instance the low level of assessment grants awarded to members of the science departments. During this visit, the evaluator received oral confirmation from the chair of the College’s Board of Trustees that assessment efforts since 2007 have led the faculty to more consciously align themselves with the Board’s goals, which coincide with the General Education Outcomes. The evaluator also spoke in depth with the College’s faculty assessment liaison, two of whom came from science backgrounds (Anthropology and Biology), as well as representatives from across the programs outside of Career and Technical Education (see table in “Evaluation Methods”), each of whom provided detailed discussion of assessment efforts in their areas related to the Recommendation.

In general, the “Focused Interim Report” of March 2009, and the subsequent focused visit on April 10, 2009, provided good evidence that the College has made substantial progress in expanding and deepening the culture of assessment into new levels with an emphasis on “closing the loop” by taking appropriate actions for improvement at all three levels. While the “Regular Interim Report” remarked upon “notable exceptions of pockets of excellence . . . in programs such as Nursing, Writing, and Business,” the evaluator this time found that this excellence was spread more evenly across courses, departments, and programs because of activities such as widespread use of the “Assessment Project Template,” which has helped departments to identify which course outcomes roll up into program and general education outcomes. This template is easily applied at all levels of assessment and also asks the assessor(s) to decide what specific improvement actions will be taken. (Appendix G.)

This template also allows flexibility for the complexity of a comprehensive community college’s mission and scope. Some areas of the College have not developed distinct program outcomes because a distinct program might be missing. For example, Anthropology teaches just a couple of classes, but Anthropology has identified the general education outcomes relevant to its offerings within the Social Sciences department to meet the requirements of the Recommendation. This is more than just a method to ensure compliance to the standard, though,

as this assessment has allowed the department to measure and evaluate effectiveness at the general education outcome level.

Much of the broadening and deepening of College efforts to respond positively to the Recommendation has been the development of numerous efforts through the College's *Assessment Café*. According to the reports of administrators and faculty members across the College, ongoing *Assessment Café* newsletters and workshops have explained the rationale for meeting the Recommendation and have inspired numerous ways for faculty members to create rubrics that “roll up” from course to program to general education outcomes. These efforts are allowing faculty and administration to examine data from each area—course, program, and general education—to determine effectiveness and quality. These efforts are also creating a curriculum map that will allow the College to determine that courses are being instructed with clear expectations for students and at the appropriate level of rigor.

Interviews conducted with faculty members provided numerous examples that illustrate how assessment at all levels is widespread and has become increasingly effective since 2007. Several reported that the development of course and department rubrics have allowed them to break learning outcomes into rank-ordered lists, thereby allowing them to address parts of learning more effectively, which a previous holistic approach did not allow. Others who give the rubrics to their students prior to assigning work find that the subsequent discussion and application has improved learning in quantifiable ways while expanding qualitative understanding of the connection of a particular course outcome to the general education outcomes of the entire program or College. One program provided an excellent example of using assessment to address curricular gaps within a program of study, correlating poor performance among students evaluating epidemiological research in a health program to the need for a remedial math course to build the skills necessary for the required level of competence. In general, efforts across disciplines have helped departments and other curricular areas make significant progress toward developing common standards and expectations, as required by the Recommendation.

The most important example of this comprehensive effort is the “3-Year Assessment Plan,” which has been initiated to analyze and evaluate general education outcomes across all disciplines and degrees. This plan is cyclical and ongoing rather than linear and episodic and will require all areas of the College to be scrutinized for quality and improvement on an ongoing basis. Other examples include the “Course Approval Form” (Appendix D) for Curriculum Committee, which requires documentation of assessment methods in course, program, and general education areas. A helpful template, based on the work of Nichols & Nichols and designed to force assessment into a “closing the loop” model, has also been developed and is widely used across campus (Appendix G). The evaluator also perused Professional Improvement Plans during the visit, which include extensive documentation of each faculty member's performance and progress, and noted that there were memorable instances of faculty members using course, program, and general education assessment for professional growth opportunities.

Finally, as someone once stated, if an organization's budget is an expression of its mission in dollars, then the expansion of this culture of assessment and its broad adoption by faculty members has to be well funded. As was noted in the 2007 “Regular Interim Report,” the administration “has invested resources to try and build interest and expertise within the faculty and staff toward building a culture of assessment and improvement of student learning” (p. 6),

and this commitment has continued and grown. The Course Assessment Coordinator, who is now finishing a dissertation project on assessment, continues to be supported. New release positions in transfer education and career and technical education have been added. Faculty members continue to be supported in their efforts through numerous opportunities for stipend and release activities. In general, the dissemination and practice of assessment knowledge, as well as the high quality of that knowledge, has rendered substantial improvement at COCC over the 2007 visit.

Conclusions

Central Oregon Community College has made significant progress on the Recommendation made in the April 2007 “Interim Evaluation Report.” The College does not require a further visit on assessment as it has substantially met all of the areas of concern indicated in the Recommendation.

Commendations

1. The College is to be commended for the development of the “3-Year Assessment Plan” because the plan lays the foundations for an assessment effort that measures outcomes at the course, program, and general education levels on an ongoing basis, including in the cycle data collection, feedback, and improvement.
2. The College administration is to be commended for its support of faculty assessment efforts through numerous mechanisms, including support for faculty coordinators and summer support for faculty members and programs engaged in assessment activity.
3. The College is to be commended for its development of the *College Way Assessment Café*. Through its engaging and comprehensive approach, the *Café* has broadened and deepened the culture of assessment across campus.