

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT

Central Oregon Community College
Bend, Oregon

April 16, 2004

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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's accreditation by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities was reaffirmed after a full scale accreditation visit in the spring of 2002. The visiting team requested a focused interim report and evaluation for the spring of 2004.

Purpose of the focused interim report/visit

The purpose of the focused interim report and visit was to address the following five general recommendations made by the full scale accreditation team:

1. "that the institution systematically build on the mission and strategic goals established by the Board, evaluates its activities, including teaching, and uses the results of their evaluation to improve instructional programs and institutional services."
2. "that the institution ensure applied or specialized associate degree programs of one academic year or more in length contain a recognizable body of instruction in the area of computation."
3. "that the institution measure the effectiveness of its educational programs and their impact on students and makes improvements as identified through this evaluation process. While progress is evident with respect to identification of student outcomes, there is no evidence of a comprehensive institutional assessment plan."
4. "that the institution provide resources so as to ensure support services are sufficient to meet the needs of students regardless of where or how enrolled, and by whatever means educational programs are offered. In addition, career placement services must be available and consistent with student needs and the institutional mission."
5. "that the institution show evidence that it employs full-time faculty who represent each field or program in which it offers major work."

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Evaluation of report and review of visit

The College provided a clearly written, well-documented interim self study that carefully addressed each of the Commission's five General Recommendations. The report provided information explaining actions taken responding to each recommendation and projected next steps. The report also included data being used to assess progress and success in each recommendation, and lists of individuals responsible for planning and/or preparing responses. The report did not include an extraneous matter; all data, descriptions, and planning processes included in the report were directly related to the general recommendations. The executive summary at the beginning of the report provided an outline that allowed the reader to see the connections among the responses and the overall construction of the report. The report's careful focus on the issues included in each recommendation provided a clear view of progress being made by the institution.

In addition to the interim report, the College provided a current catalog, class schedule, and Institutional Assessment report in advance of the visit. The college also provided the following documents and information on site:

Assessment Planning Team minutes

Board minutes

Academic Affairs minutes

Student surveys

COCC's web site provided ample information regarding instructional assessment activities. Processes, timelines, and documentation regarding Program for Excellence in Assessment grants are all provided on the web page. College personnel provided statistical studies and program updates as requested.

Individuals interviewed during the visit

COCC's Liaison, Vice President Kathy Walsh, set up group interviews with the following faculty and staff:

Faculty Assessment Team: Finney, Hays, Lyons, Quay, Sequeira, Kress, Donohue, Agatucci, Hoppe. At least one faculty member in this group was a recent hire, and was already immersed in assessment projects.

Related Instruction and Vocation Faculty: Brody, Moore, Palagyi, Haury, Kuhar. These faculty clarified the steps taken to assure that all technical/professional programs included identifiable coursework in related instruction, and that all programs were staffed by an appropriately qualified full time person.

Assessment Planning Team: Walsh, McCoy, Paulson, Kress, Moore, Paradis, Pierce. The team honestly evaluated progress in assessment to date, and discussed possible outcomes in the next year or so.

Student Services (including off-campus services): Thompson, Moore, Viles, M. Smith, Moorehead. This group clarified the challenges in providing student services to a campus

without a central student area, and the success in establishing various counseling and advising services in a library location. The Dean of the Redmond campus outlined how comprehensive student services (including career services) were provided through online means and part time staff at off campus sites.

Student Affairs Assessment Team: Neil, Thompson, Moore, Viles, M. Smith.

Analysis and Evaluation of Responses to Commission's General Recommendations

The self study, the various documents provided by the college, and the faculty, staff, and administration provided a comprehensive response to the Commission's five general recommendations.

Recommendation 1: The committee recommends that the institution systematically builds on the mission and strategic goals established by the Board, evaluates its activities, including teaching, and uses the results of their evaluation to improve instructional programs and institutional services (1.B).

The College is building a comprehensive system to evaluate all sectors of the College's activities pertaining to Board Ends One and Two. The College organized an Assessment Planning Team in the fall of 2002 to give direction to an institution-wide process that would identify Institutional Success Indicators, and that could coordinate assessment activities in instruction, student services, administrative services etc. Other entities (standing, temporary, ad hoc) were charged with organizing assessment activities, identifying goals and objectives, clarifying processes with the campus community and so on. Written records supplied by the College reveal the following initial activities:

In September 2002 the Board decided that Ends One and Two were to be the College's primary focus.

In 2002, APT met several times a month to discuss the establishment of Institutional Success Indicators and review the initial version of the Student Learning Outcomes as drafted by the Academic Affairs Committee.

Chairmoot (Instructional Department Chairs) addressed assessment issues in every one of its biweekly meetings between 2002-04 (see also Recommendation 3 below).

Academic Affairs (standing committee) addressed its role in assessment in regular meetings from 2002-04.

An Institutional Comprehensive Assessment Plan (ICAP) was approved by the Board in January of 2003. Activities and projects to support the plan were launched in 2003-04 by Instructional and Student Services areas. Some assessment results have led to appropriate changes in Student Services.

The first of what is planned to be an annual series of Institutional Assessment Reports was issued in September, 2003. It consisted mainly of key data indicators prepared by the Institutional Researcher.

The process has been organic over the last few years, with the various teams changing processes and even identities as useful information came available. The College's commitment to creating a culture of assessment is evident in the regular

appearance of planning documents and reports in the minutes of virtually every significant governance and operations group, from the Board of Trustees to the Instructional Department Chairs from the fall of 2002 to date.

At this point, the various arms of the College are gathering data to set goals or to measure whether or not goals are being met. The APT expects that the process of goal setting and evaluation will lead to the improvement of instructional programs and institutional services, but it is too early in the process for such results to be apparent.

Concern: While the College appears to be systematically building on the Board's mission and goals, and while assessment appears to have become institutionalized, it is too early to tell if assessment will be used to improve programs and services. At least 1-2 more years of data gathering will be necessary before many such improvements are evident.

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends that the institution ensure applied or specialized associate degree programs of one academic year or more in length contain a recognizable body of instruction in the area of computation (Policy 2.1, General Education/Related Instruction requirements.)

The appropriate College groups (Professional/Technical Council, Academic Affairs Committee, and the Assessment Teams) have reviewed all degree and certificate programs in the professional/technical areas, identified the appropriate courses in related instruction (including computation) required for the degrees and certificates, and listed those courses in the catalog under the appropriate degree and certificate requirements.

Recommendation 3: The Committee recommends that the institution measure the effectiveness of its educational programs and their impact on students and makes improvements as identified through this evaluation process. While progress is evident with respect to identification of student outcomes, there is no evidence of a comprehensive institution assessment plan (Policy 2.2, Educational Assessment).

The College has made significant gains in initiating a comprehensive institutional assessment plan. As noted in 1 above, the Board of Trustees provided the College with a set of Board Goals to guide in the creation of education goals. In January, 2003, the Board approved an Institutional Comprehensive Assessment Plan. Both the Assessment Planning Team and the Faculty Assessment Team (created as a response to the 2002 accreditation visit) have selected five Success Outcomes related to the Board Goals; these Success Outcomes provide guides for developing assessments to measure effectiveness in instructional programs. In September, 2003, the College issued its first Institutional Assessment Report consisting primarily of statistical studies related to the five Outcomes.

Faculty were invited to submit assessment projects to the Faculty Assessment Team for funding in 2003-04. Projects were to be focused on "meaningful questions" that would indicate success in various disciplines, and consisted in large part of requests for data from the Institutional researcher (for example, Allied Health requested studies of pass rates, employment surveys, student and employer satisfaction surveys, and

completion rates). Departments and programs will analyze data, set goals as indicated by the data, and make changes in curriculum and services if necessary.

The instructional assessment plans all relate directly to the Institutional Comprehensive Assessment Plan and, if fully implemented, will provide adequate measures of instructional success. However, departmental participation varies, with some departments (speech, foreign languages) and programs (technical/professional, Writing in Context) proposing carefully developed, comprehensive assessments and others (science) showing little progress. It will be important for all departments to measure academic success of their students.

Concern: While with a few exceptions, a “culture of assessment” is building in the instructional division, assessment projects are in their early stages, and it is still too soon to tell if assessment results will be used to modify programs to improve student success.

Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that the institution provide resources so as to ensure support service are sufficient to meet the needs of students regardless of where or how enrolled, and by whatever means educational programs are offered. In addition, career placement services must be available and consistent with student needs and the institutional mission (Standard 3)

Through the creation of a new CAP center and the redesign of the College’s online services, the Student Services area now provides appropriate advising and counseling services to students in person and online. Career services counseling is now available to all students both on and off the main campus. Appointment records and online “hits” indicate that increasing numbers of students are taking advantage of the College’s student services.

Recommendation 5: The Committee recommends that the institution show evidence that it employs full-time faculty who represent each field or program in which it offers major work (Standard 4.A, Faculty Selection, Evaluation, Roles, Welfare, and Development).

The College has embarked on an ambitious faculty hiring program (15 new positions in the current year) to ensure that all programs and certificates are served by at least one full time faculty member who can adequately represent that program.

Conclusion

The College has made remarkable progress in addressing issues concerning assessment and evaluation. A culture of assessment now seems to permeate all areas of the campus. A number of projects have been started to evaluate whether or not the campus is accomplishing the Board’s two primary goals. While the process for assessment and evaluation includes a step for closing the loop, it is too early to tell if that important last step will be carried out, given that few projects have progressed that far.

The College has moved quickly to address issues concerning staffing, student support, and related instruction. The College's rapid, comprehensive response to the Commission's general recommendations in these areas indicates their commitment to providing services to their community at or above Commission standards.