

# Mid-Cycle Peer-Evaluation Report

Columbia Basin College

Pasco, WA

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*A confidential report of findings prepared for the  
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## Introduction

Columbia Basin College, a community college located in Pasco, Washington, was established in 1955. Columbia Basin College's accreditation was last reaffirmed in February 2012 after evaluation of its 2011 Year One Self-Evaluation Report. The college is now in the middle of its seven year accreditation cycle.

### Assessment of Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The evaluators would like to thank the college for its work in creating a clearly written, user-friendly Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report and for its hospitality during the visit. The report was informative and well-organized and the college made supporting materials readily available. After visiting the college, the team found the report to be an honest and accurate assessment of Columbia Basin College's strengths and challenges as it moves through its current seven year evaluation cycle.

### Mid-Cycle Evaluation Format

As directed by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the intent of this report is to evaluate the processes that Columbia Basin College is using as it continues the process of evaluating End States (i.e. Core Themes) in support of verifying mission fulfillment. As the college was asked to organize its report into three distinct parts, the evaluation team has chosen to address each part in narrative fashion.

### Response to Recommendation 1 from the 2011 Year One Peer Evaluation Report

*Recommendation: The evaluation panel recommends that the College review its objectives, outcomes, and indicators of achievement to ensure that they are aligned with each other, are specific and meaningful, and collectively can provide direct evidence of mission fulfillment. (Standard 1.B.2)*

This Recommendation was given to Columbia Basin College by the 2011 Year One Peer Evaluation Team and the college was asked to address it in its Year Three Report in the fall of 2013. However, the college's Year Three Report was delayed by the Commission for one year and was replaced with a Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report in the fall of 2014. Due at least in part to this change in report requirements and structure, the college neglected to address the Recommendation in its Mid-Cycle Self Evaluation and the Mid-Cycle Evaluation Team was unclear about how the response to the Recommendation was to be addressed and evaluated. The evaluation team contacted the Commission for direction on this issue. While awaiting Commission response, the college supplied the evaluation team with an addendum to its Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report that addressed the Recommendation during the afternoon of the first day of the team visit. Again, the evaluation team was unclear on its role in evaluating the Recommendation and did not receive a response from the Commission until after the conclusion of the second day of the visit. Therefore, the evaluation team spent very little time evaluating the college's report regarding the Recommendation or attempting to evaluate that response.

Nevertheless, it is clear from the college's general discussion of its continuous process of creating and revising core themes, objectives, and indicators, that the college is addressing this recommendation. Since the 2011 Year-One Peer Evaluation Team submitted the Recommendation, the college has dropped one core theme and has revised indicators in each of the remaining core themes. Based upon this work and the work shown in the sample core theme that was analyzed for the Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report, it is clear that the college is continuously reviewing core themes, objectives, and indicators to ensure that they are generating specific, meaningful, and direct evidence of mission fulfillment.

### **Part I: Overview of Mission Fulfillment**

Columbia Basin College has a clearly developed multi-year plan in place for determining mission fulfillment through the assessment of five core themes (which are also referred to as End States at CBC). Each core theme (academic, workforce, basic skills, cultural enrichment, and well-being) is regularly reviewed and updated by the Board of Trustees and the Board is updated annually on progress related to achievement of each core theme. This progress is measured by assigning point values to indicators tied to objectives within each of the core themes. Once point values are assigned, a roll-up of points at the end is used to determine mission fulfillment.

The Board is updated on progress related to the achievement of each core theme through the use of End State Monitoring Reports. An End State Monitoring Report is provided to the Board during each month from January through May on one specific core theme, with a complete Mission Fulfillment Report submitted to the Board in June. This final Mission Fulfillment Report includes a proposed "grade" for the college in relation to mission fulfillment. The Board then reviews this Mission Fulfillment Report and determines an official grade for the college regarding its level of mission fulfillment.

This annual review of core themes and mission fulfillment had already led to a cycle of continuous improvement. The college has eliminated one core theme and is in the process of making changes to others. These changes are being made in an attempt to ensure that all core themes are theory based, are supported by data, and are measurable in a manner that provides the college with actionable data. For example, the college notes that access to new statewide college transcript information from the Mutual Research Transcript Database (MRTE+) has led the college to consider the expansion and revision of indicators for at least one core theme objective. The college believes that this new data will allow it to measure revised indicators that will enable the college to assess objective and core theme fulfillment at a more granular and therefore more actionable level.

The college has done a remarkable job of collecting and assessing statistical data in ways that ensure reliability and validity of measures. The use of regression analysis, weighted mean performance, and frequency distribution when assessing data, are all indicators that the college is committed to gathering useful data rather than just gather data for sake of gathering data.

It is clear that the Board of Trustees, Senior Administration, and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness are all deeply involved in the process of establishing core themes, reviewing and revising objectives, and reviewing, revising and developing performance level indicators for use in measuring core theme achievement and mission fulfillment. However, involvement by other college constituents is more

difficult to determine. For example, while End State Monitoring Reports are provided to the Board, it is unclear how information from those reports is systematically shared with the campus community or how priorities for improvement are set. While the End State Monitoring Reports are made available on the college website, it is not clear how specific core theme indicators are chosen as areas of focus following an End State Monitoring Report, who is charged with addressing specific concerns about an indicator, or how initiatives undertaken to improve success in meeting an indicator are tracked and assessed. At the same time, when an indicator is selected for improvement (as is discussed in Part II below) it is clear that assessment results are being used in the pursuit of improvement and that innovative attempts to improve indicator performance are supported by college administration.

## **Part II: Operationalizing Core Theme and Mission Fulfillment Assessment**

Part II of the report does an excellent job of using one core theme (Academic) and one objective of that core theme (“Students Demonstrate Progress”) to illustrate how the assessment process used at Columbia Basin College (CBC) ties back to Mission Fulfillment. Analyses are made of both “intracampus” data (to map CBC improvement) as well as “intercampus” data in the comparison of CBC to comparable colleges in the state of Washington. Part of the analysis of this objective revealed an issue with lack of success in math courses that related to the pre-college level classes. Math faculty have collectively addressed this issue with promising curriculum revisions that will hopefully improve student success while shortening the number of quarters of pre-college math enrollment.

Another example of the college responding to a need and removing a potential barrier to student success was in the area of retention. A course that previously existed (College Strategies) but was not required has been revamped and is now required of all new students who place at the pre-college level in two or more subjects. This 4-credit class (HDEV 101) provides information, learning strategies, academic planning, and other skills students need in order to navigate the challenges of being new to the college experience. Preliminary data indicate that this course may have a significantly positive impact on student engagement, retention, and overall success.

In evaluating outcomes assessment plans and progress using the NWCCU mid-cycle rubric, the report indicates specific areas that are highly developed with specific examples in 1) assessment planning, 2) implementation, 3) use of valid measures, 4) using results, and 5) planning and budgeting. However, overall, there are also areas that are merely emerging (e.g. alignment between curriculum and outcomes, faculty involvement, and feedback) or developed (results collected, discussed and used, and alignment of outcomes and planning and budget).

The ongoing work of the Teaching and Learning Committee to encourage the assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (SLO’s) by individual faculty as well as faculty joining together across the campus is a very positive step. Opportunities exist for faculty to learn about assessment and to share the results of their efforts in a forum format. However, it does appear that a systematic, consistent effort to assess for the six Student Learning Outcomes by faculty in the classroom is missing. A project focusing on the measurement of the Critical Thinking and Communication SLOs revealed both strengths and weaknesses in the participating students and steps are being taken to address the areas of low scores. While this is quite impressive, it is hoped that focus is also directed toward the other SLOs as CBC moves toward the

end of the seven year cycle. There is a sense that perhaps clearer expectations for assessment need to be clarified.

The college's plan to have the Council for Aid to Education conduct an assessment of additional learning objectives as a pre- and post- test should supply valuable information on the achievements by a random pool of students. Although these surveys may be of great benefit in understanding the progress in the development of learning outcomes in a sampling of students, it is hoped that the college will continue to encourage the participation of faculty in the ongoing assessment of student learning outcomes.

The college also recognizes the need for improvement in linking the results of Program Reviews to mission fulfillment. The current Program Review format being used is relatively new (2011-2012), but the template is thorough and will offer useful data that will inform mission fulfillment in the future. A newly hired Vice President for Instruction has the role of overseeing the completion of the program reviews and getting the college back to a regular rotation of annual reviews. This continuity should be a great benefit in the linking of the Program Reviews to the core themes, objectives, and indicators.

The college is well aware that the Well-Being and Cultural Enrichment Core Themes have been the most challenging to assess but it is also evident that much attention is being given to these two to clarify indicators and to produce actionable data in their assessment. To the college's credit, they value these two themes as important aspects of the college experience, and rather than replace them, they are exploring methods of evaluating them in meaningful ways.

### **Part III: Effectiveness of Mission Fulfillment Assessment System**

Columbia Basin College has a clear, thorough, and well-designed mission fulfillment assessment system in place. The college has established core themes, objectives, and indicators that are regularly assessed, are adjusted and revised as needed, and are measured using valid and reliable data measures. These measures are used to report on core theme and mission fulfillment to the college on an annual basis, providing the college with the opportunity to assess mission fulfillment over a multi-year process. There are also excellent examples of how this assessment data is being used by different areas of the college in the pursuit of continuous improvement.

However, as CBC points out, the work of continuous improvement is never done. While assessment of some core themes is quite strong, it is weaker and less defined in others. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes is also an area where some excellent progress is being made, but where there remains work to be done.

#### **Standard 2 Assessment**

The evaluation team is aware that Columbia Basin College was originally scheduled to provide a Year-Three Self-Evaluation Report in the fall of 2013. That self-evaluation report would have included a response to Standard 2, while the Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report submitted for this evaluation has no such requirement. However, the college did include a short update on Standard 2 in Appendix E of its Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report. While Standard 2 was not a focus of this Mid-Cycle Evaluation and while no

attempt was made to verify the contents of Appendix E, the evaluation team found no reason to question the Resources and Capacity of Columbia Basin College as it continues through its current seven year evaluation cycle.

### **Conclusion**

After reviewing Columbia Basin's Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report and visiting the campus, the evaluation team is confident that the college is well positioned to provide evidence of mission fulfillment and sustainability in its Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report.