

Year One Peer-Evaluation Report

Skagit Valley College

Mount Vernon, WA

March 1 - May 20, 2011

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

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Introduction

Skagit Valley College was founded in 1926 and has been continuously accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities since 1948. The college serves students in a predominantly rural three county area in western Washington State. Skagit Valley offers courses in academic transfer, professional-technical and basic skills programs to approximately 7000 students and 4,545 full-time equivalent students. The college operates two campuses and three centers. The main campus is located in Mt. Vernon, WA. The college also operates a campus on Whidbey Island. The college's three centers are located on South Whidbey Island in Clinton, WA; in Friday Harbor, WA; and in downtown Mt. Vernon.

Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report

A three-person peer-evaluation team from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities conducted a Year One Peer-Evaluation of Skagit Valley College in an off-site virtual environment from March 1 – May 20, 2011. The panel was also asked to review issues related to the college's 2009 Comprehensive Evaluation Report and the college was asked to address these issues in an addendum to the Year One Report. The review was conducted via a pre-review conference call, a shared draft of the initial evaluation report via email, and a panel-wide review of the final evaluation report via conference call and email.

The Evaluation Committee was supplied with both an electronic and a hard copy of the college's Year One Report, along with a hard copy of its 2010-2011 College Catalog in advance of the Commission's deadline. The Year One Report Committee at Skagit Valley was composed of faculty, staff and administration. The report was well written and organized for the most part. Each major component of the Commission requirements was addressed, easy to locate and the visual layout of the report made it very reader friendly.

At the same time, the panel wishes to caution Skagit Valley that, due to the fact that evaluators reside outside of Washington, additional information may need to be supplied to evaluators regarding specific components of the Washington Higher Education system. One example includes the chart referencing the Student Achievement Initiative on page four of the report. While the data supplied in the table may in fact be useful, the lack of a description of what the numbers in the chart reference or how the point system is set up makes the chart meaningless to an evaluation team unfamiliar with the system. Moreover, this system-wide database was referenced several times throughout the report, but was only minimally described on page 14, at the end of the report.

The panel would have also found it helpful to have some evidence supplied to augment the narrative regarding Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 from the 2009 Comprehensive Evaluation Report. While responses to the recommendations were provided, the lack of evidence supplied made it difficult for the panel to determine how the college has progressed in response to the recommendations.

Topics Addressed as an Addendum to the Self-Evaluation Report

Skagit Valley was asked to “address the issues related to [previous Commission] requests as an addendum to its Spring 2011 Year One Report.” While each of the three Recommendations was briefly addressed in the body of the Year One Report, no evidence was supplied to help the evaluators determine the extent to which the three recommendations have been addressed. However, the college did address each recommendation in narrative form.

General Recommendation 1: The Evaluation Team recommends that the College demonstrate, through regular and systematic assessment, that students achieve the Learning Outcomes as defined within the General Education Learning Values. Although the College has provided evidence that Learning Outcomes are assessed in a variety of courses throughout the institution, it is unclear the extent to which individual students achieve a sufficient number of learning outcomes through their course requirements and electives.

The college has taken steps to address Recommendation One by establishing a system for measuring student attainment of general education learning outcomes. This process has been through at least one complete cycle and the data from that cycle is currently being used to review learning outcomes with which data show that students are struggling. The panel encourages the college to continue working toward addressing this recommendation and gathering verifiable data as evidence in this area.

General Recommendation 2: The Evaluation Team recommends that the College continue its efforts to increase consistency in the implementation of the outcomes assessment process and increase the understanding of faculty and appropriate staff about the assessment needed to continually improve student learning, based on assessment results.

The college has worked to address Recommendation Two by providing training for faculty and by designating a faculty member to serve as a designated assessment liaison for faculty. Stipends have also been made available to faculty working on assessment projects. Finally, the college points out that most programs have updated their Learning Outcomes Assessment Plans as part of this process. The panel encourages the college to continue working on this recommendation as it prepares for its 2013 Year Three Report and Visit.

General Recommendation 3: The Evaluation Team recommends that the College regularly and systematically evaluate all faculty at least every five years. In particular, evidence indicates the need to increase consistency in the evaluation of part-time faculty.

The college has worked to address Recommendation Three by revising the post-tenure evaluation process for full-time instructors and by implementing an annual evaluation process for

all adjunct faculty. Finally, the college has made its evaluation of other full-time faculty more systematic. The panel encourages the college to continue these new processes and to gather evidence that verifies that these new and revised processes are meeting the concerns addressed in Recommendation Three.

Report on Eligibility Requirements

According to the 2010-2011 Skagit Valley College Catalog, Skagit Valley operates and awards degrees “under the supervision of a local Board of Trustees, appointed by the governor” of the State of Washington. (Eligibility Requirement 2).

As documented in its Year One Report, Skagit Valley has clearly defined its mission and core themes. The mission was last revised in 2006 and is a part of the Board of Trustees’ policies. The college’s core themes were developed during 2010 and all college stakeholders were given the opportunity to provide input. The college’s Board of Trustees adopted the Skagit Valley Core Themes and Objectives on February 22, 2011. The college’s mission and core themes directly tie to its purpose of serving the educational needs of its constituents. (Eligibility Requirement 3).

Report on Standard 1.A Mission

Skagit Valley College’s mission statement is prominently displayed in the College Catalog and is available on the college’s website. The mission was last formally approved by college’s Board of Trustees on April 11, 2006. The college’s mission reads: “Skagit Valley College exists to expand opportunities and horizons for students and to improve the communities in which they live. We achieve this by welcoming and valuing diverse learners, providing quality education and support, and contributing community leadership and service.” This mission statement provides purpose and direction for the college and its educational efforts. (Standard 1.A.1).

Skagit Valley College defines mission fulfillment by measuring the level of performance achieved with regard to each of the college’s three core themes. While the institution has yet to have time to implement the standards for measuring the levels of performance, it has a clear plan for doing so and has established a goal of achieving 85% of its stated outcomes on an annual basis as its means for determining mission fulfillment. (Standard 1.A.2).

Report on Standard 1.B Core Themes

Skagit Valley College has established three core themes:

- 1) Fostering Quality Learning Opportunities and Outcomes
- 2) Building and Supporting Healthy Communities
- 3) Creating and Supporting Educational Alignment, Achievement and Transitions

Each of the three core themes encompasses essential elements of the mission and, collectively, they encompass the mission. (Standard 1.B.1).

The college has identified Core Theme Objectives, Indicators of Achievement, Desired Outcomes and Rationale for each of the three core themes. It is clear the college has worked hard to establish clarity in this process as it goes forward and is working to set verifiable indicators of achievement. However, the evaluation panel found this focus to be stronger and more complete with regard to Core Theme One than it was for Core Themes Two and Three.

In Core Theme One, the college has established a framework that moves from its objectives, to clear indicators and to clearly articulated desired outcomes. The college has also given thought to the tools it will use to measure achievement of these outcomes.

When addressing Core Theme Two, the college also sets up clear objectives and indicators. However, the desired outcomes are less clear and appear to be more difficult to verify. For example, desired outcomes three and four both speak to students performing “above average” or “above system average.” However, the system tool being used for comparison is not clearly articulated. Additionally, the lack of a threshold in desired outcome five also makes it difficult to verify. Finally, in desired outcome six, the Year One Report references a President’ Climate Commitment. Due to a lack of background provided regarding what that Commitment is, it is difficult to determine how achievement of that desired outcome will be verified. Additionally, the college may wish consider the phrase “healthy communities” in core theme two and how that phrase might be perceived to only address physical health and whether clarifying the college’s definition of the word “healthy” in this context might add clarity to the core theme.

Finally, when addressing Core Theme Three, the indicators provided are simply restatements of the core theme objectives rather than being indicators of how those objectives will be achieved. The evaluation panel found this core theme to be the most vague in its present stage of development.

Overall, the college has done an admirable job of establishing core themes that speak directly to its mission and, when combined, collectively encompass its mission. The college has also made significant progress in establishing objectives, indicators and desired outcomes for each of those core themes. The college is encouraged to continue to work to clarify each of these areas, especially with respect to Core Themes Two and Three. Additionally, the college is encouraged to consider its goal of being “above average” with regard to student performance on various instruments and how that threshold will fit in with its stated goal of continuous improvement. (1.B.2)

Summary

Skagit Valley College has a mission that is appropriate to its function as a community college and that gives direction to its educational purpose. The college has clearly defined guidelines for determining mission fulfillment and has established three core themes that are derived from its mission. The college has also established clear objectives for each core theme and is making significant progress on establishing clear indicators and desired outcomes for each of those core theme objectives.

With regard to the requested addendum in response to Recommendations 1, 2 and 3 from the April 2009 Full-Scale Evaluation Committee Report, the evaluation panel compliments the college on the changes that have been made at the institution since the 2009 visit and encourages the college to continue this work and to gather verifiable evidence of this work prior to its year three visit.

Commendations

Commendations:

None

Recommendations

Recommendations:

None