

NWCCU Year Three Self-Evaluation Report Summary for the SU Community

On March 1 2013, Seattle University provided to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) its Year Three Self-Evaluation Report. The report is available to faculty, staff and students and can be found at www.seattleu.edu/accreditation.aspx.

As discussed below, the year three report is designed to respond to specific standards and indicators provided by NWCCU and its primary audience is the NWCCU evaluation team. Consequently, the report may not prove to be an easy read for others. The purpose of this summary is to provide some context for the report and to share with faculty and staff key findings and outcomes.

Accreditation Overview

Regional accreditation is a voluntary, self-regulatory system used in American higher education to support quality assurance and institutional improvement. It recognizes colleges and universities for performance, quality, and integrity. Accreditation also qualifies institutions and attending students access to federal funds, including financial aid and grants. NWCCU is the regional accrediting agency for 162 institutions in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. Please refer to the statement at the end of this document for more information on accreditation.

Like other accrediting agencies, NWCCU defines standards for institutional performance and specifies processes for evaluation. These processes are built around institutional self-evaluations reviewed by an evaluation team comprised of volunteers from peer institutions. While the work of accreditation supports institutional learning and improvement, the primary audience for an accreditation report is the evaluation team and NWCCU.

In the past NWCCU conducted evaluations on a ten-year cycle and required an interim report in year five and a comprehensive report and site visit in year ten. In 2010 NWCCU moved to a seven-year cycle:

- In year one, the institution is required to clarify its mission and establish core themes that “collectively encompass the mission” and a set of verifiable indicators to define success in fulfilling the mission and core themes. In year three, the institution is required to demonstrate that it has the resources and capacity to fulfill its mission and core themes.
- The year three report addresses governance, leadership and management, policies and procedures, human resources, education resources, student support resources, library and information resources, financial resources, and physical and technological infrastructure.
- In year seven, the institution is required to demonstrate that it engages in purposeful, integrated and comprehensive planning; it systematically assesses learning outcomes, program effectiveness, and indicators of mission and core theme fulfillment; and it uses the results of these processes to determine and communicate institutional effectiveness and success.

Change from Site Visit to Offsite Evaluation in 2013

Seattle University was originally scheduled for a site visit in April 2013. NWCCU chose to convert many year three site visits, including the visit to Seattle University, to offsite evaluations. The offsite evaluation means that, in addition to receiving our report and accessing supporting documentation, the peer evaluation team will be able to speak with individuals on campus. These discussions (via phone or email) will be scheduled by the Office of University Planning at the request of the evaluators.

Recent Background of Seattle University Accreditation:

2010 Comprehensive Evaluation and 2011 Year One Self-Evaluation Report

Seattle University completed its final comprehensive self-study report under the old NWCCU standards in 2010 and received two commendations and six recommendations. The university was commended for exemplary campus-wide commitment to the university mission and for the success of our Collegia and learning communities programs. The six recommendations were (1) to develop comprehensive and systematic assessment of learning outcomes, (2) to better integrate institutional planning and communicate assessment, (3) to strengthen the process of reviewing new programs, (4) to ensure appropriate faculty levels given institutional goals, (5) to enhance support for the educational and scholarly expectations of faculty, and (6) to improve institutional expertise in management of information technology.

In 2011 Seattle University submitted its year one report under the new standards. This report articulated acceptable thresholds for mission fulfillment and defined the core themes through which our mission is fulfilled. Our five core themes align with our five strategic priorities; the core themes, however, are more concrete and less aspirational than the goals the university has developed relating to each strategic priority. The year one report also included a response to the 2010 recommendation regarding assessment of learning outcomes.

In response to this report, we received no recommendations and two commendations for our progress in creating a framework for systematic assessment and for developing clear metrics for defining success.

Content and Structure of the Year Three Self-Evaluation Report

The year three report includes basic data, a response to 2010 recommendations, an updated Standard One on mission and core themes (originally submitted in the 2011 year one report), and Standard Two, addressing resources and capacity, which comprises the bulk of the report. The year three report follows the structure outlined by NWCCU. To make it easy for the evaluators to find the information they need, each item is answered directly and fully in sequence. Each response contains the following three elements:

- Text of standard from NWCCU {e.g. " 2.A.4 The institution has a functioning governing board..."}
- Response from SU {e.g. "Seattle University's Board of Trustees is a 35-member voting board..."}
- Supporting Documents {List of documents, all provided electronically}

This approach means the report is not a cohesive narrative that tells the full story of Seattle University, but it works well for its intended audience of the evaluators and NWCCU. Campus readers will note that because the report only addresses the topics required by NWCCU, some aspects of the university are not represented in our typical fashion. To find topics that are of interest to you, please consult the table of contents or search the PDF for specific words or phrases.

Key Findings in the Year Three Report

Overall: As noted above, the most substantial and significant part of the year three report is the response to standard two, in which the institution determines whether it has the resources, capacity and infrastructure to fulfill its mission and its educational commitments to students. The report communicates to the evaluation team that Seattle University has in place the capacity and resources to fulfill these important standards.

Core Theme Four: The only change to Standard One was an update of core theme four - from *Formation for Leadership* to *Great Student Experience* - reflecting the change in the strategic priority.

Governance: The university is a not-for-profit educational organization that operates under the direction of the Board of Trustees, President, and Cabinet. Governance is accomplished through a variety of councils and committees, including the Academic Assembly, Deans' Council, student governance groups, and various groups focused on topics such as rank and tenure and curriculum revision. Policies and procedures are clearly communicated and equitably applied. In areas where the NWCCU has established new accreditation requirements or standards, the university is in the process of formalizing practices to meet these expectations.

Human resources: The university employs an adequate number of qualified faculty and staff to deliver its mission of educating students. Position descriptions specify minimum requirements and regular evaluations provide faculty and staff feedback. Employees are provided with the support necessary to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. New positions are created through the budget process and plans for new programs and services take into account the potential need for new hires.

Education resources: Academic programs are aligned with the university's mission, contain content appropriate to the degree level, and are structured around learning outcomes. Faculty members have the central role in curriculum development and assessment.

Student support resources: The university provides a safe and effective learning environment for students, including advising, student services, and classrooms and labs. The university admits students who have the potential to succeed and benefit from its education. When changes are made to academic program, the university works to minimize the impact on current students. The best example of this practice is the "do no harm" principle underlying the transition of students to the new Core curriculum. The university catalog, learning outcomes, academic policies, and code of conduct are readily available online. Co-curricular activities support the mission and core themes.

Library and information resources: Through the Lemieux Library and McGoldrick Learning Commons and the School of Law Library, the university provides access to library and information resources. Library resources and services are regularly evaluated to ensure they meet needs.

Financial resources: The university is stable financially and has established protocols to ensure that finances are handled in accordance with accepted principles. Resource planning and development uses realistic projections of enrollment and revenues and involves constituents in an appropriate manner.

Physical and technological infrastructure: The university's infrastructure is sufficient to deliver its mission but is an area of constraint. The university has responded by approving upgrades to the network and technology support services. These will have a positive impact on the campus. The university's infrastructure (both facilities and technology) is maintained in an intentional fashion and capital plans outline major projects.

Recommendation one, assessment of learning outcomes: The framework described in the 2011 response to this recommendation include roles and responsibilities for various groups and individuals on campus to ensure that all programs participate in and benefit from regular assessment. The university has implemented this framework and made substantial progress in meeting this recommendation.

Recommendation two, institutional planning: A new strategic plan was approved in February 2013 that integrates previous plans and establishes data-based methods for evaluation. This plan builds upon the strategic priority action plans, identifies goals and specific initiatives for progress over the next five years, and provides a foundation for communication of institutional progress to stakeholders.

Recommendation three, planning and implementation of new academic programs: New academic programs are proposed by academic units and are subject to a structured and thorough review process that involves all appropriate stakeholders. Multiple committees and offices must review and sign off on proposals and the Cabinet exercises budget approval as it does with all new expenses.

Recommendation four, goal of more tenured/tenure-track faculty: The university seeks to provide a mix of faculty that is appropriate to each program. The university is meeting most of the goals outlined in the *Academic Strategic Action Plan* but remains below our goals in the area of tenured faculty teaching 100-level core courses. We recognize that changing the composition of the faculty to increase tenure-track faculty is a multi-year project requiring sustained investment.

Recommendation five, faculty support: The university has made a formal commitment to providing faculty with the appropriate resources, tools, and support to fulfill their responsibilities as educators and scholars. In recent years, the university has approved substantial increases in faculty support funding. Departments such as the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Projects and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning provide essential services, while programs such as the Junior Faculty Development Program provide direct funding.

Recommendation six, technology expertise: The university created the position of Chief Information Officer as an internal position to provide strategic technology leadership as well as oversight of the

Office of Information Technology and management of the contract with Ellucian (previously SunGard Higher Education). In 2011 the university hired Mr. Charles Porter, who previously was a managing partner and CIO for the global consulting firm Accenture.

Accreditation Committee Membership

Robert Dullea	Vice President for University Planning and Vice Provost Accreditation Liaison Officer
Joyce Allen	Registrar
Carol Wolfe Clay	Professor, College of Arts and Sciences, Academic Assembly Representative
Ruth Donohue	Manager of Human Resources
Doug Duncan	Associate University Counsel
Robert Duniway	Assistant Vice President for University Planning and Director of Institutional Research
Heather Geiger	Manager of University Planning
Donna Horn	Manager of Operations and Quality, Facilities Services
David Lance	Assistant to the Executive Vice President and Assistant University Counsel
Charles Lawrence	Associate Provost for Student Success
Ivette Serna	Director of University Budgets
Jocelyn Tidwell	Administrative Coordinator
Tim Wilson	Assistant to the Vice President, Student Development

Evaluation Committee Members

Dr. Paul B. Reichardt (chair of evaluation committee)
Provost Emeritus, University of Alaska Fairbanks
Assignment: 1.A, 1.B, 2.A, Eligibility requirements 2-21

Dr. Thomas Greene
Interim Provost, University of Portland
Assignment: 2.C (shared), 2.D

Dr. Mark Stewart
Associate Dean, Faculty Development/Director, Office for Faculty Research and Resources/Professor of
Psychology, Willamette University
Assignment: 2.C (shared), 2.E

Mr. Carl Vance
Vice President for Business and Finance/Treasurer, Lewis and Clark College
Assignment: 2.B, 2.F, 2.G

STATEMENT ON ACCREDITATION

Seattle University is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities indicates that it meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality evaluated through a peer review process. An accredited college or university is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Institutional integrity is also addressed through accreditation.

Accreditation by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Inquiries regarding an institution's accredited status by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
8060 165th Avenue N.E., Suite 100
Redmond, WA 98052
(425) 558-4224
www.nwccu.org