

Year One Peer-Evaluation Report

Great Basin College

Elko, Nevada

March 1 - May 20, 2011

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

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Year One Peer-Evaluation Report: Great Basin College

I. Evaluators

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities arranged for the following evaluation panel to review the Great Basin College's year one self-evaluation report:

Dr. Dana L. Thomas, Chair, Vice Provost and Accreditation Liaison Officer,
University of Alaska Fairbanks,

Dr. Jane Sherman, Vice Provost for Academic Policy and Evaluation,
Washington State University, and

Ms. Sally Graves Machlis, Professor and Chair, Department of Art and Design,
University of Idaho.

II. Introduction

The evaluation panel received electronic and hard copies of Great Basin College's Year One Self-Evaluation Report, a digital copy on CD of the GBC general catalogue, and a letter dated February 25, 2010 from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities with a summary of accreditation activity. In addition, the submission letter provided electronic links to the college strategic plan.

GBC provided an historical overview of the development of the GBC from a Community College status to offering select bachelor's degrees with an on-going development of a long-term Institutional Strategic Plan. GBC also provided an institutional context addressing the various degrees, the investment in distance education and current financial conditions. In addition, GBC provided a brief update on institutional changes since the last accreditation report including facilities, the development of an updated mission statement in 2008, and changes in personnel, organization, programs, and enrollment.

III. Assessment of the Year-One Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The evaluation panel found the year-one self-evaluation report and support materials addressed the elements of standard one and were formatted according to Commission expectations. However the inclusion of extensive institutional and departmental strategic and aspirational planning made the report confusing to read with respect to the institution's preparation to document meaningful and assessable indicators of achievement for its objectives and, ultimately, mission fulfillment.

IV. Topics Addressed as an addendum of the Self-Evaluation Report

There were no recommendations from NWCCU in the 2008 evaluation report, thus no response was required.

V. Eligibility Requirements

Great Basin College is one of four public community colleges in Nevada under the auspices of the Board of Regents for the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE). In light of the late notice from Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities about year-one self-evaluation reports addressing eligibility requirements 2 and 3, we encourage Great Basin College to provide a brief summary of how the institution meets these eligibility requirements when revising the response to standard one for the year 3 report.

VI. Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

Standard 1.A Mission

GBC's revised mission statement along with its strategic plan was accepted by the NSHE Board of Regents in August 2009 and appears on the institution's web site and in the general catalogue. The mission statement is a brief and vague statement followed by a more extensive Commitment Statement, which articulates the purpose more fully. Taken together, as GBC indicates they should be, these two statements articulate a purpose appropriate for an institution of higher learning. While this extended mission statement (including the Commitment Statement) articulates serving the disparate needs of students, business, industry, technology, and celebrating history, environment and culture, the panel felt it was lacking in direction and emphasis. While it appears that GBC is primarily a community and technical college with a few select Baccalaureate programs this is not clear from the mission statement and is only made somewhat clearer with addition of the commitment statement.

The institution provides the following paragraph defining mission fulfillment:

“An acceptable threshold or extend [sic] of mission fulfillment is determined by review and evaluation of a combination of the GBC long-term Strategic Plan and Assessment Framework. Both consider the four college Core Themes that reflect the GBC mission. Continual progress toward achieving goals and objectives in the Strategic Plan and outcomes and measurements defined in assessment documents (all based on GBC mission and commitments) are considered as the acceptable threshold.”

While this definition states a threshold, the panel did not find this statement helpful or clear because the “assessment documents” were not described or provided. In addition, the panel was unable to determine results for individual indicators or collections of indicators that would lead to different conclusions about mission fulfillment or the extent of mission fulfillment. For example, if the College's evaluation found that fall-to-fall persistence rate, an indicator for the Student Success theme, declines over time, which it did in the data summary provided by GBC, is GBC still fulfilling its mission? Thus, the panel did not find that GBC articulated institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment.

Standard 1.B Core Themes

GBC has identified and described the following four core themes:

- Core Theme 1: Student Success
- Core Theme 2: Planning and Performance
- Core Theme 3: Sustainability
- Core Theme 4: Serving Rural Nevada

The narrative for each theme provided important additional information that helped evaluators better understand the extent and purpose of each. The panel found Core Theme 1: Student Success, and Core Theme 4: Serving Rural Nevada, to reflect essential elements of its stated mission (including the commitment statement).

Core Theme 3: Sustainability relates well to the commitment statement “foster awareness of our physical, natural environment for the benefit, enrichment and edification of future generations.” However, this definition of sustainability is not reflected in the objectives or indicators supporting this core theme. The planning part of Core Theme 2: Planning and Performance does not directly reflect GBC’s mission. The panel found that Themes 2 and 3 focused on aspirational plans rather than on fulfilling the institution’s primarily teaching mission. For example, Theme 2 includes objectives to *add new programs* and *continually evaluate for developing new programs*. The two indicators listed for Theme 2 are *percent of programs and departments with strategic plans* and *number of certificates and degree program options offered*. Similarly, Theme 3: Sustainability includes objectives *explore greater external funding resources* and *develop economic partnerships and relationships*. These two themes are primarily focused on planning not doing. Planning is a means to an end, not an essential component of the mission. Therefore, GBC should revise its themes to identify the essential elements of its mission.

Finally, GBC acknowledges that the “dignity and respect” element of its mission is not easily assessed, but still believes that it is worthy of attainment. However, this element is not found in the themes or objectives. Thus, overall, the panel did not find that GBC identified core themes that individually manifest the essential elements of its mission and collectively encompass the mission.

Examples of departmental tasks and objectives were given for each theme; these were numbered in a way that was not explained. The panel found the inclusion of the departmental tasks and objectives unnecessary and confusing to the presentation. While including these tasks and objectives indicate vertical alignment within the institution, these belong in the year 5 report that addresses institutional planning, not in this report on Mission and Themes.

Goals were identified for each theme and multiple sample objectives given for each goal. Indicators of achievement were given for each theme, not for each objective. Thus, it was not clear to the panel which indicators were to be used to evaluate accomplishment of the objectives supporting its core themes. The objectives generally relate to the themes. However, some of the institutional objectives, e.g. 2.1 and 2.4, state they are “currently under review.” In addition, some objectives suggest that accreditation standards are not being met, e.g., “Develop a system for documenting student achievement on expected learning outcomes.” Many of the indicators of achievement are clearly resource and capacity assessments rather than indicators of

achievement illustrating that objectives (goals) are met. Assessing existing resources does not provide a meaningful measure of outcomes or accomplishments.

The indicators are not connected to the objectives as required by Standard 1.B. 2, which requires that the institution identify meaningful, assessable and verifiable indicators of achievement that form the basis for evaluating the accomplishment of the objectives.

Finally, while some indicators are clear and meaningful, many are vague and need revision or further clarification. For example, for Core Theme 3, Indicator 4 *Total number of instructional faculty* or indicator 6. *State general fund appropriations* are input measures, not achievements and so should be revised. Similarly, Core Theme 4: Serving Rural Nevada includes Institutional Goal 15: Continue to develop and deliver high quality distance educational opportunities and GBC lists a theme indicator 1 *Percent of distance education*; this indicator does not indicate quality so either the objective or the indicator needs revision or clarification.

VII. Summary

GBC's year-one self-evaluation report is the first step in the recently revised accreditation process. It is clear the institution took this step seriously and attempted to respond to the new standards. The evaluation panel found it distracting that so much departmental strategic planning and aspirational goals were included. Two themes, Sustainability and Planning and Performance, as articulated through the objectives and indicators, define planning and processes rather than essential elements of GBC's mission. Indicators are provided for themes, not for objectives, and often do not relate well to the stated objectives. Significant work is needed to make the year one report a sound basis on which to build the year three report.

VIII. Commendations and Recommendations

The evaluation panel makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation One: The panel recommends that the GBC clarify institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold of mission fulfillment (Standard 1.A.2).

Recommendation Two: The panel recommends that the GBC identify core themes that individually manifest essential elements of its mission and collectively encompass its mission, and that relate to what it is doing rather than what it is planning to do (Standard 1.B.1).

Recommendation Three: The panel recommends that GBC clarify the objectives for each of its core themes and identify meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement that form the basis for evaluating accomplishment of the objectives of its core themes (Standard 1.B.2).