A FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT

GREEN RIVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Auburn, Washington

April 13, 2007

Prepared by

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A CONFIDENTIAL Report Prepared for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
that Represents the Views of the Evaluator
INTRODUCTION

In April, 2005 a focused interim visit was done in order to evaluate progress on five recommendations from NWCCU which were generated after an April, 2003 full-scale evaluation (after which accreditation was reaffirmed). The determination in 2005 was that concerns resulting in four of the five recommendations had been resolved but student learning assessment had only been partially resolved and two recommendations were subsequently made concerning these. Green River’s accreditation was reaffirmed by NWCCU after the 2005 focused visit, but the commission did request that the college submit a focused interim report to document progress on the two recommendations and prepare for a focused interim evaluation in April, 2007.
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INTRODUCTION

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FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

Green River Community College prepared an eighteen page report addressing each of the two recommendations about student learning assessment. This report was complete, clear, and concise in reporting recent activities concerning campus-wide assessment of student learning at the course, program, and college level. Appendices were well organized and gave a clear picture of the assessment events historically and since the 2005 focused visit. This evaluator arrived on campus with a clear impression of what has been happening at Green River in assessment.

The evaluator validated the College's Focused Interim Report through arranged interviews with appropriate college representatives, a review of supporting and requested documents which included Program Assessment and Improvement (PA&I) notebooks, examples of assessment projects, and specific course syllabi. A review of the college web site was also particularly helpful. The Evaluator met jointly or individually with the following college personnel during the one day visit:

Rich Rutkowski, President
April Jensen (Ph.D), Executive Vice-president (over instruction and student services)
David Hyllegard, Director of Research & Planning
Sam Ball, Dean of Instruction, Capital Projects
Judy Burgeson, Dean of Instruction, English, Humanities & Science, LOC member
Krista Fox, Assistant Dean for Professional Technical & Workforce Education
Christie Gilliland, Executive Dean of Instruction for Transfer Education
Diane Martin, Assistant Dean of Language, Academic Skills & Wellness
Kim Nakano, Dean of Library & Media Services; Teaching & Learning Center Liaison
Jorge Ramirez, Executive Dean of Student Services
Rebecca Rhodes, Assistant Dean for Professional Technical & Workforce Education
Ron Wheadon, Executive Dean of Instruction for Professional Technical & Workforce Education
Joyce Hammer, Math Division Chair
Jaeney Hoene, English Division Chair, Written Communication Outcome committee
Leslie Kessler, Health Science and Family Studies Division Chair
Marcie Sims, Interim English Division Chair
Sidney Weldele-Wallace, Business Division Chair
Frank Primiani, Business Law faculty, Classroom Assessment & Program Research Specialist
Julie Moore, English faculty, Chair of Learning Outcomes Committee (LOC)
Janet Ash, Engineering faculty, LOC member
Barbara Brucker, Physical Therapy Assistant faculty, LOC member
Dean MacKenzie, LOC member
Marji MacKenzie, Reference Librarian, LOC member
Paul Metivier, Ceramics faculty, LOC member
Ajay Narayanan, Physics faculty, LOC member
David Nelson, Math faculty member, LOC member, Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning committee
Brenda Bindschatel, Accounting faculty member, Attendee of Summer Institute
Diane Holz, Family Studies, Early Childhood Education faculty
Sandy Johanson, Philosophy faculty member, Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning committee
CRITERIA-BASED ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Recommendation #1 – It is recommended that the College clearly define the educational assessment process as a whole, integrating tools and mechanisms that have been developed into a cohesive, systematic plan with regular timelines for completion. College-wide planning processes should be considered in establishing these timelines to ensure integration of educational assessment findings in College decisions (Standard 2.B.1).

Green River Community College has a clearly articulated assessment plan, which defines its approach to the assessment of student learning across the curriculum, within each academic program, and within each course. The College has improved a pre-existing process for program review. This is a well-defined system for evaluating programs in terms of personnel, curriculum, instructional resources, facilities and equipment, support services, learning outcomes, and, if applicable, relationships with advisory committees and the community. All programs – both transfer and occupational – have been placed on a schedule for Program Assessment and Improvement (PA&I) which rotates in such a way that each is evaluated every 5 years. These program reviews are thorough and include the assessment of student learning outcomes for both program specific and campus-wide outcomes. These reviews must address the specific outcomes evaluated, areas for needed improvement which were revealed in the assessment process, changes implemented in teaching and/or learning to address these needs, and any new questions which have arisen as a result of this process.

GRCC was already strong in the outcomes assessment of professional-technical areas of study, but their program assessment schedule now includes the programs (i.e. majors) in eleven divisions and there is clear evidence that each program review is being done in a consistently thorough manner. There is also evidence that the findings from assessment have influenced faculty and divisions in planning and have guided specific adjustments in future approaches to education.

Recommendation #2 – It is recommended that the College ensure that its educational assessment program is comprehensive and consistently applied to all degree programs or offering and leads to evidence-based improvement of teaching and learning (Standard 2.B.2, 2.B.3, Policy 2.2, Eligibility Requirement 12).

Green River Community College has identified and published expected student outcomes for all programs leading to the Associates of Applied Arts, Associates of Applied Science, Associates of Pre-Professional, and Associates of Science degrees and all certificates. GRCC conducts alumni surveys to assess whether or not they have achieved these outcomes (Standard 2.B.2; Eligibility Requirement 12).
The faculty agreed several years ago to commit to the four student outcome abilities of Written Communication, Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning, Responsibility, and Critical Thinking. Two years ago, assessment of these campus-wide outcomes was occurring but inconsistently and without clear illustrations of the college community “closing the loop” in terms of determining the effect of assessment on student learning. Each course taught at GRCC has been evaluated as to which one or more of these outcomes are addressed and this information has been entered on the publicly accessible Learning Outcomes Tracking System (LOTS) database. The applicable competencies of the outcomes are also published in the classroom syllabus for each course. Faculty teaching courses in which competencies of abilities are both taught and assessed are encouraged to submit assignments or projects for campus-wide assessment by the specific Assessment Team.

For each Learning Outcome there is a three year cycle of campus-wide assessment during which assignments or projects are gathered from across campus and assessed according to a community rubric (year one), faculty respond to the findings by implementing strategies for improvement (year two), and assessments of the changes in year two are done to ascertain effectiveness of the strategies (year three). The first ability to be assessed by this method was Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning, and it is in its second year of the three-year process. The 2006-2007 school year was the first year of assessment for the Written Communication ability. All 4 abilities are being assessed at the course and program level (Standard 2.B.3).

In addition to these campus-wide activities, it is also clear the college is using assessment at the program level to reveal strengths and weaknesses in all aspects specific to each program. Individual faculty or groups of faculty are designing and executing projects in order to improve teaching and learning at the course level relative to course, program, or ability expectations.

The conceptualization and implementation of the assessment model has been entirely faculty driven, and they are supported and aided in their review process by both peer help and administrative support. The College has provided funds which can be administered by the Learning Outcomes Committee (LOC) to support specific assessment projects designed by the departments. The College has also provided funds to support a faculty member in the capacity of Classroom and Program Assessment Research Specialist. This individual is available to assist in the design and implementation of projects and to stimulate faculty to think “outside the box” in terms of approaching creative methods for assessing what is be learned in the classroom. There are also funds available for faculty to attend the Summer Assessment Institute, a faculty-led week where they can receive guidance on developing an assessment project, assessment rubric, and/or the retooling of an existing classroom assignment to strengthen it as an assessment tool, as well as planning an upcoming PA&I process. It is apparent that these opportunities have contributed in a large way to the improvement in the college’s assessment efforts.

Although the accreditation process and the evaluation of each college are based on quantitative evidence, one cannot or should not ignore completely the more intangible aspects such as commitment and enthusiasm. Assessment at GRCC has become, for many of the faculty, about added value and using the assessment process to strive for excellence in teaching and higher levels of learning in students. The assessment process has drawn faculty from different areas together and resulted in a more global perspective of their own campus.
CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Green River Community College is completing regularly scheduled program reviews which follow a well developed scheme. The College also has a faculty-generated model for the assessment of campus-wide outcomes which is clearly articulated, and they are systematically applying this model across the curriculum incorporating all programs – transfer and occupational. Assessment projects are being continually developed by both individuals and groups of faculty. There are many resources available both financially and with support staff to assist faculty in their assessment endeavors.

COMMENDATIONS

1. Green River Community College faculty are to be commended for the progress they have made in implementing their assessment model, for the incorporation of assessment throughout the academic community, and for the enthusiasm that is taking hold and the commitment that is driving the assessment process.

2. Green River Community College administration is to be commended for providing personnel and financial support to the faculty thus enabling and encouraging them in their efforts to use the assessment process to improve teaching and learning throughout the curriculum.