

**Mid-Cycle Evaluation
Year 3**

Peer-Evaluation Report

Green River College

Auburn, WA

May 1 – 2, 2023

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

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Introduction

A two-person evaluation team conducted a Mid-Cycle Evaluation visit to Green River College on May 1 – 2, 2023. The visit covered Standard One in response to the *Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report* submitted by the college to the Commission on March 17, 2023.

Green River College is a public, comprehensive college located in South King County, Washington. It offers 4-year Bachelor of Applied Science degrees, associate degrees, one-year certificates, short-term certificates, basic education for adults, and community education.

In 2020-2021, Green River College served approximately 13,000 students, roughly half of which were considered full-time. Approximately 55% of college-level students prepared to transfer to a four-year institution while 31% pursued career technical education.

Visit Summary

An electronic copy of the Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report was provided to the evaluation committee approximately six weeks prior to the visit. The 31-page document included sections addressing required components of the Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report Guidelines, and reference documents were available through links embedded in the report. Outstanding recommendations were not assigned to this visit, but the college provided an update on Recommendations 1 and 2 from the Spring 2020 Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability Evaluation of Green River College. The evaluation committee found the report to be helpful and informative. The college was very accommodating with providing supplementary materials as requested throughout the site visit.

The two-person evaluation team met with members of the Executive Leadership Team, Strategic Planning Action Recommendation Committee, Institutional Effectiveness, Learning Outcomes Committee leadership, Library Services, and Student Services.

The Green River College community was engaged, collegial, welcoming, and accommodating throughout the visit. Many took time to meet with the evaluation committee and were very helpful in learning about the college. A student representative provided feedback gathered from students that underscored the college's commitment to being a student ready college. The committee would like to sincerely thank the college for its hospitality and support before, during, and after the visit.

Part I: Mission Fulfillment

Green River College (GRC) defines mission fulfillment as organizational achievement of consistent and measurable progress toward each of the six Strategic Plan goals, as measured by success metrics. GRC's Strategic Plan was developed through an iterative process, which began slightly before the start of the Covid-19 global pandemic and was sustained through robust engagement with appropriate internal and external stakeholders. A core part of the GRC Strategic Plan is its Equity Statement, which provides a clear commitment to "be an anti-racist institution where all students, faculty, and staff receive the access, resources, and services needed to achieve their educational, career, and personal goals." It was clear to the Mid-Cycle Evaluation team throughout the visit that the GRC administration, faculty, and staff understand and affirm the Strategic Plan's commitment to equity. Similarly, the team's interaction with a representative from student government supported that the institution's equity lens is also recognized and valued by students.

GRC's current work to reimagine its governance structures were understood by those with whom the team interacted, and it was evident that there is great hope that the newly formed Strategic Planning Action Recommendation Committee (SPARC) will create cross-functional synergy to close equity gaps and advance the institution. Throughout the campus visit, individuals and groups expressed understanding of the need to reengineer GRC's governance processes to engage stakeholders in meaningful ways in accomplishing policy development and to inform decision making. Those participating in the scheduled discussions during the visit acknowledged that an ongoing goal for mission fulfillment at GRC is to assure that *each* employee of the institution can see their role within the context of the Strategic Plan, mission fulfillment, and the interrelated nature of organizational work.

An additional dimension for GRC's mission fulfillment work and its development of the Strategic Plan is its engagement with external stakeholders. Through on-campus discussions and interviews, it was clear that the processes that GRC employs to engage external stakeholders are robust. Employers, political, and civic leaders are engaged, K-12 educators are consulted, and the institution utilizes data regarding the students in their service-area "pipeline" to inform future direction. Through its comprehensive community needs assessment process, GRC determines what future needs might be and uses that information to guide planning.

Standard 1B1 indicates that an "institution demonstrates a continuous process to assess institutional effectiveness." The standard also requires that "the institution uses an ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness." GRC reported that it had paused its Program Assessment and Improvement Process (PA&I), but it also plans to restart the PA&I process for 2023-2024. A pause to reevaluate processes reflects institutional reflection. GRC's redeployment of the PA&I process, accomplished systematically and comprehensively will position it to demonstrate compliance with Standard 1B1 in a future

evaluation visit. GRC also indicates that it will be implementing processes for determining program viability to refine and/or stop programs and to develop new programs. Like with PA&I, processes for program viability/prioritization and development are reported as future plans. GRC's implementation of such processes will position it for compliance with 1B1.

Standard 1B2 expects that "an institution sets and articulates meaningful goals, objectives, and indicators" and that it does so within "the context of and in comparison with national peer institutions." GRC has developed and is implementing comparative processes for regional peers. It is in the planning stages for development of national peers. Its continued work and ensuing implementation of systematic use of regional and national peers will position GRC to meet Standard 1B2.

As a result of meetings with GRC stakeholders, there was a clear recognition that additional work remains in order to identify meaningful indicators and metrics that are measurable, systematically available, and can be leveraged for comparison against peers. Use of existing data sources, such as the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) and national surveys, will assist GRC in sustained data collection that will allow for metrics and indicators to be compared in meaningful ways against regional and national peers.

Standard 1B4 speaks to environmental scanning that assures an institution's "governance system...considers such findings to assess its strategic position, define its future direction, and review and revise as necessary its mission, planning, and intended outcomes of its programs and services." GRC's ongoing work to implement a new integrated governance process holds promise since the presented model will integrate all dimensions of the organization into a decision-oriented body (SPARC) that will be tasked with monitoring progress and actions to accomplish the Strategic Plan, anchored by GRC's equity focus.

Part II: Student Achievement

The use of regional and national peers to compare college-wide student achievement data is on the right path, but not complete. A set of regional peer institutions has been established and relies upon the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges for comparative data regarding regional peers. The college followed a logical process to establish the set of peer institutions, largely informed by similarity of communities and students served within western Washington. It was evident that faculty and staff understood who their peer institutions were. GRC acknowledged that the process to evaluate comparative data is still underway, and that national peers are still being framed. While the various stakeholders understood the need to focus on GRC's mission, informed by equity, the work is underway to establish measurable metrics/performance indicators.

The Institutional Effectiveness/Institutional Research staff were aware of the need to work with the college community to identify measurable metrics, often from existing data sources, or from ongoing existing surveys. Once all metrics have been established, the use of comparative tools against regional and national peers will be meaningful, and the college can also measure against itself longitudinally in its efforts to accomplish continuous improvement. Deployment of a systematic process for institutional effectiveness does seem to be lagging, which consequently limits the ability of the institution to find meaningful use of peer comparisons. When establishing and then implementing metrics, GRC is encouraged to consider indicators that are not simply binary, but metrics that provide meaning and context for the college to know the extent to which efforts are affecting student achievement, rather than just knowledge that an effort had been accomplished. Use of existing data sources, such as the VFA and national surveys could aid in the sustained collection and review of metrics to ensure that continuous evaluation of stated goals and objectives is being accomplished.

An important dimension of an institutional commitment to improve student achievement is its link between decision-making and action that results in improved student achievement. Standard 1B4 indicates that the institution “through its governance system...considers such findings to assess its strategic position, define its future direction, and review and revise, as necessary its mission, planning, intended outcomes of its programs and services, and indicators of achievement of its goals.” The pandemic disrupted GRC’s positioning to fully launch its Strategic Plan to functionally accomplish a 2021-2016 plan. Recalibrating the plan, deploying meaningful and ongoing assessments and use of metrics, and establishing a new time horizon may be useful. The governance processes at GRC are in flux, and the college is encouraged to fully implement the new SPARC model and assure that timely decision making occurs that monitors the implementation of the Strategic Plan, provides for future direction, and is cognizant of the centrality of assuring learning outcomes are met while using an equity lens.

Part III: Programmatic Assessment

It is core to the NWCCU Standards that learning assessment be continuous and ongoing to inform actions focused on improvements. A meeting with the Learning Outcomes Committee (LOC) during the visit provided the team with insight into the assessment processes currently in place. Over the last few years, the LOC has engaged in robust discussions regarding how to accomplish learning outcomes assessment, intending to make the process more meaningful for faculty and students, and to incorporate assessment approaches that directly lead to changes in teaching practices. This work has been guided by the LOC leadership, in partnership with instructional and institutional effectiveness leadership. The group reviewed lessons learned from the implementation of common assessment tools (e.g. for quantitative and symbolic reasoning), and worked toward a revised model in which faculty could tailor the assessment

tools to their discipline, and potentially increase the usefulness of assessment results to guide instructional practices.

Operationally, the college merged the two traditional avenues through which faculty complete program assessment: Program Assessment and Improvement (PA&I) managed through the VPI's office, and program learning outcomes assessment through the LOC. Academic programs are reviewed through PA&I on a 5-year cycle using a report that includes outcomes assessment work in addition to standard data such as enrollments. The LOC supports program learning outcomes assessment through annual projects designed within programs, focused on one or more program outcome.

Merging the two methods helped to clarify that Program Outcomes Assessment is part of the larger PA&I report. The annual assessment project cycle was shifted to bi-annual in order to support longer and more meaningful assessment projects. This new structure was approved at the end of Fall 2022, and plans are underway to put it into practice. LOC leadership reported that seven programs are currently supported to undertake assessment projects under the new structure. Each program will be asked to report out findings to the LOC using a form that includes both narrative and quantitative data. The idea is to gather all data, interpret it, and act on it. It is not yet clear who will do the work of digesting the information gathered and make recommendations for improvement-oriented actions.

GRC is encouraged to move from discussion and planning into action during 2023-2024 and beyond in order to assess learning outcomes at the course, program and college-wide levels, and to use the results to inform actions aimed at improving student learning. It is clear that college leadership has thought deeply about student learning and intends to create a structure for outcomes assessment that is meaningful and leads to improvements in student learning and achievement. The revised process is in the initial stages of implementation. The evaluation team encourages further development and clarification of outcomes assessment processes that are systematic and scalable, while maintaining the action-oriented focus on using results of assessment cycles to improve student learning.

PART IV: Moving Forward

The Green River College community expressed a shared passion and commitment to the mission of the college and the common purpose of serving students. The collaboratively developed Strategic Plan (2021-2026) is rooted in equity and was well understood by campus representatives during the site visit, with many citing examples of how their current work advances Strategic Plan goals and objectives.

The aspirations detailed in the Strategic Plan seemed to be widely embraced, but additional work remains in order to fully utilize the plan as a cornerstone of continuous improvement. Additional focus in three main areas should move the college toward full implementation of the Strategic Plan and continuous improvement efforts: 1) identification of success metrics, 2) clarification of decision making surrounding continuous improvement efforts, and 3) full implementation of learning outcomes assessment to improve student learning.

Identification of meaningful success metrics is still underway, and the evaluation team encourages the college to define metrics that are measurable, systematically available, and useful for comparison against peer institutions. In this regard, it may be beneficial to consider recalibrating the plan to establish a new timeline beyond the current five-year window. When establishing and then implementing success metrics, GRC is encouraged to consider indicators that are not simply binary, but to include metrics that provide meaning and context for the college to understand the extent to which efforts are being realized, rather than just knowledge that an effort has been accomplished. In addition, the evaluation team noted limited use of regional peer comparisons to inform improvements, and national peers have yet to be established. Establishment of success metrics using existing data sources would aid in the sustained collection and review of data to ensure continuous evaluation of stated goals and objectives.

Clarification of decision making would aid the college's efforts to fully implement the Strategic Plan. GRC is in the process of updating governance processes, and the college is encouraged to fully implement the new Strategic Planning Action Recommendation Committee (SPARC) and assure that timely decision making occurs that monitors the implementation of the Strategic Plan. SPARC was in the early stages, but was viewed as a hub to connect the Guided Pathways and equity work on which the strategic plan is based. Fully incorporating SPARC into the governance processes and structures should help enable it to be part of decision making around strategic planning and mission fulfillment.

GRC's redeployment of the Program Assessment and Improvement Process (PA&I) throughout the coming year and into the future should allow for sustained continuous improvement cycles for its academic programs. The evaluation team encourages GRC to clarify the process for the development of new programs, and for decision making around program viability. A comprehensive review of program offerings for relevance and sustainability would be beneficial for budgeting and resource allocation, which involve resourcing what is effective and ending support for what is not.

Finally, the evaluation team encourages further development and clarification of learning outcomes assessment processes that are systematic and scalable, while maintaining the action-oriented focus on using results of assessment cycles to improve student learning.