

# **Mid-Cycle Peer-Evaluation Report**

**Eastern Washington University**

**Cheney, Washington**

**April 16-17, 2018**

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

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## Introduction

On behalf of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), the evaluation team submits the following report on the review of Eastern Washington University's (EWU) Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report and resulting onsite visit. The onsite evaluation was conducted over two days beginning on April 16, 2018 and concluding on the afternoon of April 17, 2018. The purpose of the Mid-Cycle Review is to assess the preparations and preparedness of EWU to meet the requirements and standards of the comprehensive Year Seven Self-Evaluation. The evaluation team received a well-prepared Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation report in advance of our visit and were welcomed warmly to the campus during the onsite evaluation. We would like to thank EWU leadership and the campus community for the time they dedicated to our site visit and for the responsiveness to our questions and observations.

Evaluators were also asked by NWCCU to analyze responses to two outstanding recommendations resulting from the institution's Spring 2015 Year Seven Peer-Evaluation Report. These recommendations were addressed in addendums to the EWU Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation. They include:

### Recommendation 3

"The evaluation committee recommends that the institution engage in regular, systematic, participatory, self-reflective, and evidence-based assessment of its accomplishments, and that it documents through an effective, regular, and comprehensive system of assessment of student achievement, that students who complete its educational courses, programs, and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, achieve identified course, program, and degree learning outcomes" (Standards 4.A.3 and 5.A.1).

### Recommendation 4

"The evaluation committee recommends that Eastern Washington University's Core Theme assessments and results of assessments of programs and services are: a) based on meaningful institutionally identified indicators of achievement; b) used for improvement by informing planning, decision making, and allocation of resources and capacity; and c) made available to appropriate constituencies in a timely manner" (Standard 4.B.1).

Per NWCCU's request, the 2018 evaluation committee's response to the Commission regarding these outstanding recommendations is being submitted separately through the Mid-Cycle Evaluation Confidential Recommendation Form and is not discussed within this report.

## Mission and Core Themes

Eastern Washington University is a public, regional comprehensive university with campuses in Cheney and Spokane, Washington. The institution's mission statement and supporting bullet points reflect EWU's commitment to the Inland Northwest region and to the State of Washington.

### **EWU expands opportunities for personal transformation through excellence in learning.**

EWU achieves this mission by:

- Enhancing access to higher education in the Inland Northwest and beyond by recruiting and supporting traditional college-bound students, non-traditional students, and those from underserved populations;
- Delivering high quality academic programs that undergo regular, rigorous review informed by data and assessment of student learning;

- Delivering a high quality co-curriculum designed to develop the intellectual, cultural, personal, and practical aspects of students' lives; and
- Promoting student success by supporting student engagement and timely degree completion.

In accordance with the NWCCU Guidelines for preparing a Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation, EWU engaged in a reflection of the institution's core themes and indicators presented in the Year One Self-Evaluation Report. That reflection focused in part on the ability of the data that were collected and analyzed to provide evidence of mission fulfillment in the Year Seven Self-Evaluation. As a result of the reflection, EWU chose to revise the core themes, metrics, and targets presented in the Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report. The new core themes were approved by the President's Executive Committee on December 15, 2017 and by the EWU Board of Trustees on February 22, 2018. Evidence of Board approval was provided in an appendix of the self-evaluation report.

The **revised core themes** are:

**Access (Theme 1) + Learning (Theme 2) + Completion (Theme 3) = Student Success/ Transformation.**

In preparation for the onsite visit, the evaluation team discussed changes to the core themes with our NWCCU liaison who was made aware of the changes from both conversations with the EWU Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) and the self-evaluation report. Per Eligibility Requirement #3, the changes to core themes were approved by the Board of Trustees on February 22, 2018. The evaluation team raised some initial concerns, recognizing that changes to core themes mid-way through an accreditation cycle may have deleterious effects on an institution's ability to collect and analyze objective indicator data in preparation the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. EWU proactively addressed these concerns in their self-evaluation, reporting that the new metrics are "more organic to the institution than those articulated in the Year One Self-Evaluation Report" as demonstrated by the availability of "more than a decade's worth of admissions demographic statistics (access), assessment results (learning), and graduation rates (completion)." Evidence of the availability of some of these data was provided within the self-evaluation report.

Through follow-up conversations with our NWCCU liaison and with the campus ALO, the evaluation committee has come to understand that a Special Report dedicated to the core themes revision is being provided to the Commission simultaneously with our peer-evaluation. We support this step as a way for EWU to maintain the positive momentum in implementing its strategic plan initiatives and corresponding core theme indicators while updating the Commission on this important change.

Evaluators also note that NWCCU Standard 1.B.2 requires that "the institution establishes **objectives** for each of its core themes and identifies, meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement that form the basis for evaluating accomplishment of the objectives of its core themes." Each of EWU's three revised core themes have clearly established metrics but "objectives" for those core themes are not articulated in the report. We encourage EWU to have a conversation with NWCCU about Standard 1.B.2 as it relates to the core theme change process and any recommended preparations for a successful Year Seven report.

## Site Visit Overview

The site visit was well organized and provided ample opportunity to meet with students, faculty, administrators, and Board members. We enjoyed sufficient time to address all prepared questions and

often had time for free flowing discussion and follow-up questions resulting from the conversation. Participants appeared genuine in their responses to questions and eager to share their excitement for the trajectory of the institution.

The individuals who participated in our discussions are too many to mention by name but the groups include: student leaders; faculty senate and union executives; assessment leaders; representatives of the two exemplary programs within the report; Office of Academic Affairs staff and deans; Provost Gordon and President Cullinan; and four Board Trustees, including Chairperson Uriel Iniguez by telephone from Olympia, Washington. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to everyone who took the time to meet with us and to share their experiences and thoughts about EWU.

Our prepared questions focused on the following themes: 1) campus engagement in the strategic planning process; 2) rationale for the changes in core themes and the level of campus engagement in that process; 3) administrative support, connectivity, and sustainability of the seven new core theme and strategic initiatives committees described in the self-evaluation; 4) the new Academic Programs Assessment Committee (APAC) and its relationship to other assessment committees; 5) alignment between the strategic planning initiatives and mission core themes; 6) the reception and early results of faculty assessment training; and 7) steps to prepare for the Year Seven comprehensive evaluation.

EWU recently completed a new institutional Strategic Plan, 2018-2023 and the campus community is clearly coalesced around the four strategic initiatives:

- Drive Innovation,
- Ignite Change,
- Embrace Social Justice, and
- Transform Region.

The collaborative and inclusive nature of the strategic planning process was highlighted in nearly every group meeting and clearly contributed to the significant campus buy-in that we witnessed during our visit. The four strategic initiatives appear integrally linked to the institutions core themes of Access + Learning + Completion = Student Success. Graphical representations of the four strategic initiatives and three core themes are readily available in all corners of the campus and community members are clearly familiar with the graphics and the related activities and metrics described within.

## **Assessment of self-evaluation report and supporting materials**

The Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation report presents a thorough review of the university's progression from the Year-One Self-Evaluation to the mid-cycle and a sincere response to the NWCCU recommendations resulting from the Spring 2015 Year Seven Peer-Evaluation Report. Descriptions of student learning and mission assessment-related activities ranging from the establishment of nine new committees—APAC, Institutional Assessment Committee (IAC), and one for each core theme and strategic initiative—to the development of a general education assessment process is impressive, though it may be challenging to sustain the level of activity and engagement described.

The self-evaluation report does a good job of taking the reader through the institution's process of analyzing Year One indicator data and arriving at a conclusion that the change to core themes and metrics was warranted. That said, the distinction between well-established, new, and future planned activities is difficult to follow at times. Regardless, evaluators are confident that the university is working

collaboratively and energetically to build the infrastructure and capacity to move the institution forward in pursuit of mission fulfillment and sustainability.

Support materials included in the evaluator's room and provided upon request were readily available and informative. Materials provided in the room included several years of academic assessment data and audited financial reports. University staff were very responsive to requests for additional information. During a conversation about the opportunities and challenges of convening and tracking nine new committees, a "comprehensive timeline" with milestones and target dates was referenced. Evaluators requested and received two distinct formats of the referenced timeline within 15-20 minutes of the request. The exhaustive documents outline milestones, deliverables, and meeting dates through December 2018, offering evaluators a high level of confidence in the institution's planning efforts.

## **Part One: Overview of Institutional Assessment Plan**

As articulated in great detail in the self-evaluation report, EWU has focused considerable energy over the last two years to developing the infrastructure to successfully align and support academic assessment, strategic planning, and institutional research. The newly established Office of Institutional Effectiveness within the Office of Academic Affairs and the related national recruitment of two new administrators with significant assessment expertise is a positive step in building the institution's capacity to support meaningful assessment and data analysis to inform planning, decision making, and resource allocation.

In the self-evaluation, EWU reported that a national search for a Director of Institutional Research was underway. As of our April 16-17, 2018 visit, the position remained unfilled. We encourage EWU to muster its available resources to meet the stated goal of creating a "data dashboard for the selected metrics that it will routinely update and disseminate to the core themes committees." During our campus discussions, there was a clear appetite for data-driven decision making and a recognition that in the absence of transparent, readily available data, decision making is more difficult and potentially less consultative.

As noted earlier, EWU has created two new committees focused on academic and operational assessments. In 2016-17, the former University Assessment Committee was divided into two committees, the APAC and the IAC. The APAC reports to the Faculty Senate and is primarily responsible for academic-related assessments including all student learning outcomes in degree and certificate programs. The APAC is actively meeting and making progress on strengthening assessment plans at the institutional level and in each of the university's six colleges. As a part of improving learning outcomes assessment across campus, the university has embarked on an ambitious plan that requires all faculty to participate in a series of trainings on developing student learning outcomes and assessment plans. While the full cycle of trainings has not yet been accomplished, faculty reported being engaged in the process and appreciative of the trainings.

The IAC is responsible for assessment of the university's non-degree-granting units. In the Mid-Cycle Self Evaluation Report, EWU notes that the "IAC will start meeting monthly in late AY 2017-18, when EWU will begin its focus on improving the assessment of its operational units." At the time of our visit, the IAC was not convened and work on operational assessments was not reported.

The integration of core themes and strategic planning initiatives appears to have had a positive impact on raising awareness and understanding of the mission core themes. Metrics and targets



established for the core themes are clearly aligned to the strategic plan with target goal dates described as "...by 2023." Evaluators note, however, that the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report is due to NWCCU in Spring of 2022 and encourage EWU to be aware of the potential disconnect between the two target dates and any unanticipated impacts on the institution's preparedness to report on Standard 4 - Effectiveness and Improvement.

## **Part Two: Illustrative Assessment Examples**

The institution provided two representative examples of programs that demonstrate the way that its mission and core themes progress from objectives to indicators to outcomes to mission fulfillment: the Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration and the Bachelor of Arts in Recreation and Leisure Services. Both programs have external accreditation, which provides the basis for their assessment practices.

The Bachelor of Business Administration has measurable Student Learning Outcomes and shared rubrics that were created by faculty. The program uses the Canvas LMS to compile and coordinate their results. Canvas is the platform that faculty regularly use to assess student work, and incorporating SLO assessment seems to be relatively seamless. All faculty have access to the assessment information in Canvas.

The program provides evidence of faculty involvement in not only assessing student learning, but in analyzing and discussing assessment results. There is a College assessment committee that meets monthly and assessment results are regularly discussed in department meetings.

The Bachelor of Arts in Recreation and Leisure Services (RCLS) is accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Related Professions (COPART) and uses the accrediting body's student learning outcomes. Like the Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration, RCLS uses Canvas to gather and organize assessment data. The program has two yearly assessment meetings where results are disseminated and curricular changes are planned.

Both examples that were showcased demonstrate evidence of having meaningful indicators, and of regularly collecting, analyzing, sharing, and utilizing their data. Both also provided examples of "closing the loop" and making curricular decisions based on analysis of the student learning outcomes results.

EWU makes a distinction in its approach and process for externally accredited programs and non-externally accredited programs. While both of these programs are exemplary, it would be beneficial in the Year Seven Report to provide examples of non-externally accredited programs that follow the internal process and timeline.

## **Part Three: Preparation for the Year Seven Institutional Self Study**

EWU identified the following four focus areas in their preparation for the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report in spring 2022.

### **Degree Program Assessment**

The institution has made admirable progress in its efforts to improve student learning outcomes assessment. It is clear that the administration took the recommendations of the previous evaluation seriously and has taken ambitious steps toward improvement. There has been a broad-based process that has been successful at gathering support from students, faculty, and staff. Faculty are being trained to develop learning outcomes, to assess and analyze their results, and to implement changes based on

their findings. There are several new committees that are coordinating and overseeing this process, and faculty and administration seem confident in their ability to revitalize the university's culture of assessment. The institution is on track to provide data based on one or two rounds of student learning outcomes assessment by the time of their Year Seven Report.

### **General Education Assessment**

The Faculty Senate approved new General Education requirements in spring 2017, and the requirements began to be phased in during fall 2017. A General Education Assessment Committee (GEASC) was formed, and is overseeing assessment of the new curriculum. The university has clearly put effort into the establishment of the GEASC and will need to continue to focus on the assessment of General Education as it is phased in over a three-year period. The report states that the GEASC will design the assessment process, though during our onsite discussions it was also stated that assessment was built into the General Education learning outcomes and course approval process. The report promises one or two cycles of General Education assessment by the time of the Year Seven Report, and we encourage continued efforts to finalize the assessment plan and begin collecting and analyzing results.

### **Operational Units' Assessment**

The units in the Division of Student Affairs have published student learning outcomes and participate in a regular system of assessment. The report states that additional training will be done for the university's operational and business units and that each will have completed at least one full cycle of assessment by the Year Seven report. In conjunction with the Strategic Plan, the university established four committees, one for each of the strategic initiatives of the plan (Drive Innovation, Ignite Change, Embrace Social Justice, and Transform Region). These committees have representation from faculty, administration, and operational units' staff, and participants expressed a positive outlook about the cross-department communication and collaboration that will result. This collaboration will be important as the university moves toward the Year Seven Report.

As noted earlier in the report, the IAC was given responsibility for "assessment of the university's non-degree-granting units (e.g. Student Affairs, Human Resources, Information Technology)." This committee does not appear to be convening regularly but could be an important partner in developing assessment plans for operational units. We encourage the university to assemble the IAC as soon as possible and task them with developing and implementing assessments of operational units.

### **Mission Assessment**

The report states that the core themes committees will meet regularly to facilitate the institution's progress on student access, learning, and completion, and that the President's Executive Committee will incorporate the data from the core themes committee reports into its planning, decision making, and resource allocation. It was evident from campus discussions that the institution is already using the core themes and related strategic plan goals as a basis for decision-making and resource-allocation. As stated elsewhere in this report, the university will need to show that it is collecting, analyzing, disseminating, and using data that are based on its new core themes. We suggest establishing yearly goals and benchmarks to assist in the evaluation of progress toward mission fulfilment based on the new objectives and indicators. We also encourage EWU to be mindful of the NWCCU accreditation cycle and the potential disconnect between the 2022 Year Seven reporting timeline and the 2023 strategic plan timeline.

## **Conclusion**

EWU is at an exciting point in its history and the campus community has clearly coalesced around the new institutional strategic plan and the revised core themes. The strategic planning process was inclusive and collaborative, resulting in a strong plan and a pride of ownership that is evident across campus. We believe that EWU has built a solid framework over the past two years and has earned the community's collective commitment to implement the four strategic initiatives and achieve the indicators of success within each.

Although the previous accreditation cycle resulted in several important recommendations, EWU embraced the opportunity to improve its infrastructure and establish new processes to engage in meaningful assessment of its academic and non-academic activities. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness will be an important asset in continuing to progress from assessment to analysis to improvement. We encourage EWU to continue to improve its institutional research capacities and to make data from its various assessments and indicators of achievement available to appropriate constituencies to help guide planning, decision making, and resource allocation in the future.