

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT

**Lake Washington Technical College
Kirkland, Washington**

October 7-8, 2009

Prepared by

**Carol Schaafsma, Executive Vice President
Linn-Benton Community College**

and

**Dr. Larry Smith, Dean of Natural Science and Math
Snow College**

*A Confidential Report prepared for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
that Represents the Views of the Evaluators*

Introduction

After a full-scale evaluation visit in November 2006 the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities reaffirmed the accreditation of Lake Washington Technical College (LWTC) with four commendations and ten recommendations. The Commission requested that the College prepare a progress report in January 2008 to address five recommendations from the 2006 full-scale visit. The College was also asked to prepare for a focused interim report and host a Commission evaluator in spring 2008 to address two other Recommendations identified in the 2006 Comprehensive Evaluation Report. The College was asked to report progress and host a visit during fall 2009 to address the remaining three recommendations from the 2006 full-scale visit as well as two other recommendations from the 2008 focused interim visit. These recommendations deal with

- Institutional effectiveness
- Educational assessment
- Student placement
- Library and information resources
- Communication and shared decision making

The full text of each Recommendation is included in the body of this report.

Since the college's self-study and full-scale visit, a new President has joined the institution. In addition, other administrative changes have resulted in a new Vice President for Instruction, Vice President for Administrative Services, and Special Assistant to the President. The Director of Research has been added to the executive cabinet in order to place importance on that function. College employees report that these leadership changes have resulted in improved communication, increased participation in decision-making processes, and increased support to faculty for assessment activities.

College Report/Visit

The focused interim evaluation report prepared by the College for this visit is a concise, straightforward description of progress made on Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 since April 2008. The additional information and exhibits were well organized and easily available. The focused interim evaluation report appears to provide overall evidence that the College has made significant progress on each of the Recommendations. In addition, evaluators found that those concerns that did not rise to the level of a Recommendation, but that were mentioned in the 2006 report, have been addressed by the College.

The evaluators were graciously received by the College during their visit. The evaluators used a variety of methods to gather data and validate the College's Focused Interim Report. At various times and in various combinations, the evaluators met with the president, two trustees, all senior level administrators, student services and instructional faculty and staff, and a group of students representing various programs of study. The evaluators also spent time reviewing strategic plan documents, assessment notebooks, all-campus communications over the past year, and committee and council minutes and actions. In addition, open sessions for faculty and staff were held. All conversations with college personnel were cordial and candid.

The evaluators met jointly or individually with the following college personnel and students during their visit:

Karissa Alley, Dental Hygiene student
Scott Anton, Faculty
Elizabeth Apple, Director of Instructional Assessment
Paul Axtell, Dean of Industrial Technical
Guila Baldwin, Social and Human Services student
Letty Barnes, Faculty
Julie Blow, Human Resources
Karen Boe, Adult Ed student
Michael Bresloff, Librarian
Ken Brown, Faculty
Dr. Sunny Burns, Vice President for Instruction
Sonny Campbell, Faculty
Sang Chae, Trustee
Dave Cunningham, Research and Development
Suzanne Dalgarn, Faculty
Vera Davidyuk, Payroll
Nancy Dick, Dean of Applied Design Programs
Tien Do, TRIO
Joe Duggan, Research and Development
Doug Emory, Dean of Academics and Hospitality
Marvin Everest, Faculty
Leticia Evora, Payroll
Marli Garrels, Faculty
Ruby Hayden, Student Development
Jim Howe, Faculty
Karim Farraj, Americorps
Andrea Fechner, Academic Adviser
Monta Frost, Dental Hygiene Coordinator
Valerie Fugate, Social and Human services
Shelley Glendenning, Foundation
Christina Harter, Title III
Patricia Hunter, TRIO
Wei Jiang, ASG
Kathy Johnson, Human Resources
Linda Kirkland, Instructional Services
Hans Knigge, Faculty
Anita Ko, Dental Hygiene student
Nolan Koreski, Faculty
Brenda Larson, Assessment Center/Placement
Grace Lasker, Faculty
Brandy Long, eLearning specialist
Dennis Long, Vice President for Student Services
Maria Macedo, Allied Health and Fitness

Shirley Mahlum, Instruction
Jeanette Maurer, Horticulture student
Dr. Sharon McGavick, President
Paula McPherson, Instructional Services
Dr. Shirley Metcalf, Vice President for College Advancement
Shawn Miller, Enrollment Services
Bob Monroig, Faculty
Don Mukai, Trustee
Jo Nelson, Faculty
Vicki Newton, President's office
Jack Norvell, Faculty
Alma Osoria, Student Development
Myung Park, Director of Research and Development
Mike Potter, Information Services
Cathy Ripley, Nursing student
Greg Roberts, Executive Director of Human Resources
Cheyenne Roduin, Librarian
Heather Root, Student Services
Ed Sargent, Associate Dean of Learning Resources
Heidi Shepherd, Faculty
Christ Sitzer, Program Assistant
Erin Smith, TRIO
Adria Sneed, Opportunity Grant
Dr. Brinton Sprague, Assistant to the President
Mikal Steinbacher, Associate Faculty
Jo Stickney, MMDP
Jennifer Strother, Financial Services
Bill Thomas, Vice President for Administrative Services
Molly Verschuyll Physical Therapist Assistant
Jaime Villa, Americorp
Mark Waddington, Faculty
Sheila Walton, Student Programs
Shannon White, Dental Hygiene student
Gary Winchester, Enrollment Services
Tatyana Zasykrina, Instructional Services

Analysis

Recommendation 1: While much progress has been made, the College has yet to use the results of regular and systematic institutional assessment. Since the planning and evaluation strategies are so new, the College has not had time to utilize the results of its assessments toward improving its programs. In summary, the College should provide evidence of institutional effectiveness through using the results of its institutional assessment processes in a regular and comprehensive manner. (Standard 1.B.) (Spring 2008)

Since its 2008 focused interim visit, LWTC has continued to implement and evaluate its strategic plan, make improvements based on this evaluation, and allocate resources to achieve the planned improvements. The College has developed key performance indicators for the eight Strategic Directions and collected data for one or two years, depending on the strategic direction. The College appears to have incorporated the recommendations from the 2008 visit into the action plans of the strategic direction committees, ensuring that this work became a high priority for the College.

The spreadsheet of the key performance indicators (KPIs) is presented to the Board and college community periodically. Each strategic direction has a committee charged with the responsibility of analysis of the KPIs and identifying priorities and action plans for the following year, with a goal of improving the KPIs and college performance. These priorities and action plans are reviewed by the Institutional Effectiveness Committee. Budget requests are tied to the strategic directions. Efforts to streamline the process and to improve both the strategic directions and the key performance indicators provide evidence that the College is committed to this process and committed to assessment for the purpose of improvement.

The action plans and key performance indicators related to the strategic plan and eight directions were written three years ago. Many of the strategic direction committees are not following the action plans as written, because the College has changed since the plans were written. However, the committees appear to be evaluating progress, changing and adjusting their action plans and measures, and then focusing on new ways to move forward with the strategic directions. Although the committees have ventured away from the identified action plans, they have done so as a result of examining data and responding accordingly. In order to keep an accurate record of strategic direction committee work, the College should incorporate these changed action plans and KPIs into the official strategic plan document.

The Institutional Effectiveness Committee has identified some gaps in the strategic directions and has ideas for improving the overall process, with the goal of improving the College. Specifically, in the next planning cycle, they see ways to connect parallel and overlapping activities under the guidance of one committee. Already, the Assessment Committee and the strategic direction #2 committee have merged because their work was very similar and seemed redundant. The College was asked by the State of Washington to engage in a Student Achievement Initiative, and that work has areas of overlap with the strategic direction #3. By using these strategic direction committees to fold new work into the planning and effectiveness process, the work of these committees should continue to maintain a high profile role in the College.

The Board of Trustees, faculty, administrators, and staff all expressed a cultural shift that the College has been through as a result of their strategic planning and institutional effectiveness process. They gave examples where new measurements and evaluation have been put in place, services have improved, processes have improved, and teaching and learning have improved.

At this time, the College is dedicating resources and energy to ensure that the strategic planning and institutional effectiveness are valuable, meaningful processes that result in improved services

to students. It is critical that the College maintain this intense focus over the next few years so that this work continues to be woven into the College's newly developing, evidenced-based culture.

Recommendation 2: In 1997 and again in 2006, Lake Washington has received recommendations relative to assessing student learning outcomes. The College has yet to use the results of regular and systematic assessment to improve teaching and learning for each of its educational programs. The College has not updated each of its program learning outcomes, assessed actual student learning compared to expected student learning, nor utilized assessment results toward improving its educational programs in a regular and systematic way. In summary, the College should provide evidence of program-level educational effectiveness through using the results of its educational assessment process in a regular and comprehensive manner. (Standard 2.B, Policy 2.2) (Spring 2008)

Clear and remarkable progress has been made with regard to this repeated recommendation, partly due to new leadership, partly due to the hiring of a Director of Educational Assessment, and partly due to the fact that the faculty have now simply had enough time to increase their knowledge and implement their intention with regard to assessment and the improvement cycle. A cultural shift has also taken place; assessment that was well intentioned but spotty is now well organized and pervasive. *Every* faculty member is prepared to share how he or she has improved instruction (i.e., teaching and learning) as a result of assessment results—they practically leapt at the opportunity to do so.

New college leadership has certainly made a difference in improving institutional effectiveness and shared governance and has also improved the area of assessment. Significant resources have been allocated to acquire the necessary collective expertise and to support faculty in this effort. The new Director of Educational Assessment was hired on soft Title III money, but the College has committed to continue to fund her position if the grant is not renewed.

The Director of Educational Assessment has been instrumental in organizing and focusing the assessment efforts. She has provided a clear vision on method, needed training to instructors, and a central repository for (some of) the results. Faculty members loudly sing her praises. The will was generally there before, but she brought the way.

Instructors uniformly agree that at LWTC assessment and “closing the loop” are no longer just hoops to jump through for accreditation, but have become recognized as real benefits to themselves in helping them improve as teachers and helping them increase student achievement.

The five global outcomes expected of all graduates are widely known by the students; they report the global outcomes are on the syllabi and on flyers around campus. Degree-seeking students are specifically taught and then assessed on each of the global outcomes in at least two courses; non-degree-seeking students, at least one.

In response to the Recommendation and in consultation with advisory boards, program outcomes are also developed by each program area; they are assessed and data collected centrally for programs requiring at least 45 credit hours.

Regular five-year program reviews have received renewed emphasis and have been updated. The College plans to re-examine the format of the program reviews to see if they need to be adjusted.

The College is in compliance with the Commission's standards regarding outcomes assessment and the improvement cycle.

Commendation: The College is commended on the organization and pervasiveness of the assessment efforts and in using the results of assessment to inform improvements.

Recommendation 3: The evaluation committee recommends that the College develop and fully implement policies and procedures which guide the placement of students in courses and programs based upon their academic and technical skills. Such placement should ensure a reasonable probability of student success (as supported by research, best practices and institutional data) and facilitate advising and student persistence. (Standard 3.D.3) (Fall 2006)

The College has done additional work on student placement into appropriate classes. They have a three-pronged approach: the COMPASS assessment test, course prerequisites, and personal advising (including the possibility of instructor override of COMPASS results or course prerequisites on a case-by-case basis).

Students report that they are quite satisfied with the results of the placement instruments, and they feel that they are correctly placed into the classes that will challenge them, but where they also have a more-than-fair chance of success. The students are also grateful to advisors who placed them in math or chemistry classes they initially thought too elementary; they now realize the placement was correct.

The Focused Interim Report prepared by the College documents what the staff reported orally: programs that have implemented prerequisites have significantly improved retention rates. The staff also think that the placement procedures ensure a reasonable probability of success. However, while related, the verifying data for success is not as evident as it is for retention.

Significant progress has been made in identifying appropriate course prerequisites and "turning them on" in the student management system. One concern is that there are still a few faculty members who feel that they don't want to "prerequisite the students out of the program." Those instructors feel they can meet the needs of the students in their classes regardless of the students' preparation (or lack thereof). The response from Student Services staff to these instructors was that program enrollments may dip temporarily, but then rise again with better-prepared students, resulting in a better experience for all. Opportunity remains for college-wide discussions about

the value of prerequisites versus other methods of helping underprepared students, as well as about the need for a uniform approach by all faculty with regard to placement.

Recommendation 6: The evaluation committee recommends that the institution take immediate steps to ensure that the library and information resources are sufficient to provide an adequate core collection and the personnel to accomplish the institution's mission and goals. Information resources need to be determined by the nature of the institution's educational programs. (Standard 5.A.1, 5.B.2, 5.B.3) (Fall 2006)

The library has been transformed in the past four to five years, especially in the past two years. A reactivated Library Advisory Committee gives vision and guidance to the library staff. A new associate dean who has a masters degree in library science has hired additional qualified librarians—the funding of which is an indication of the President's commitment to improve library services and information resources. The library staff is very well regarded across campus; the students are very happy with the help they receive there (even on their algebra), and the faculty praised the library staff as “perfect.” The faculty feels the library staff is very supportive of their instructional programs.

There is a new climate of openness and a desire to get students into the library; this has resulted in increased gate counts. The library staff has been responsive to student needs (as expressed by the Library Advisory Committee) by extending the hours the library is open. They also try to take the library to the students who can't go to the library.

Faculty members uniformly reported that the library collection is adequate to meet the needs of their students (but they agreed that this hasn't always been the case, even four or five years ago). Instructors are now confident that reasonable requests for new acquisitions will be promptly accommodated if at all possible. The College has tried to insure that the library has the resources needed by students in the new baccalaureate program.

The print collection was a concern in a previous report to the Commission, both because of its small size and because much of the material was irrelevant or outdated. Since then the collection has been weeded of many outdated and irrelevant items, and significant resources have been invested in, adding new items to the print collection. However, the print collection remains small. On the other hand, the faculty do not see this as an issue because of the great access to electronic collections and databases which are often more up-to-date than print items.

Recommendation 7: The evaluation committee recommends that the College effectively enhance and utilize the institution's already established system of governance to ensure that there is more open and frequent communication and shared decision-making among the senior administration, deans, faculty, and staff. (Standards 4.A.2, 6.A.3, 6.D, Eligibility Requirement 7) (Fall 2006)

Over the past two years, a concerted effort has been made to communicate regularly with the college community, to solicit input into decision-making processes, and to clarify committee

roles and responsibilities. Based on observations from this visit, this has resulted in improved morale, trust, and participation amongst employee groups.

Probably the most instructive example of the shift the College has made in communication and participation is the Budget and Finance Committee. This committee has faculty, staff, and managers working together to receive budget recommendations from across the College, prioritize the requests, and make recommendations to the executive cabinet. These recommendations have been accepted by the cabinet, and this has increased the trust across the College that their opinions and ideas matter.

Faculty and students feel that they have a voice in institutional governance. Faculty members have not always felt this way, but they note a significant change in the quantity and quality of communication from the new president and other senior administrators. They also feel they can influence the outcome of the decisions if they are passionate enough to get involved.

Commendation: The College is commended for the extensive communication and inclusive decision-making processes.

Conclusion

LWTC has made commendable progress on effective, college-wide communication, soliciting input and following recommendations from committees and councils, tying planning to resource allocation, and assessing outcomes in programs and related instruction areas. Many faculty, staff, and students have been involved in this progress. Although there is more work to be done, committees and councils who are involved in this work are able to clearly articulate next steps and already have plans in place for accomplishing them. This forward thinking and planning demonstrates a strong commitment to continuing this work. Faculty and staff see benefit in turning to data for clues about where to invest time, energy, and money for strategic improvements.

Commendations

1. Lake Washington Technical College is commended for the exceptional commitment and high morale demonstrated by its trustees, leadership, students, and all employee groups. The evaluators were impressed by the near uniform enthusiasm for the work and mission of the College as expressed by all those associated with it.
2. Lake Washington Technical College has developed a strong and vibrant culture that values participation at all levels of the organization. The College is commended for its effective communication systems and participatory decision-making that nurture and support this positive culture.
3. Lake Washington Technical College is commended for a cultural shift that has taken place: assessment that was well intentioned but spotty is now well organized and pervasive. In addition, faculty members are using the results of assessment to improve teaching and learning for students.