

# **Focused Visit Peer-Evaluation Report**

## **Oregon State University (OSU)**

Corvallis, Oregon

October 19, 2012

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

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## **NWCCU Focused visit report: Oregon State University 2012**

**Evaluation Team:** Drs. Martha Potvin (Provost, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Montana State University) and Jane Sherman (Vice Provost for Academic Policy and Evaluation, Washington State University) spent October 19, 2012 on the campus to conduct the ad hoc review. They met with faculty, students and staff from both the Corvallis and Cascade campuses.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this ad hoc focused evaluation was to provide a thorough review and evaluation of the institution's progress regarding Recommendation 1 of the Spring 2011 Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation Report. Specifically:

*It is recommended that Oregon State University accelerate its efforts to foster, support and reward meaningful assessment of learning outcomes that spans from course assessment to program assessment and includes the Baccalaureate Core, all undergraduate programs, and all graduate programs (2.C.2, 2.C.3, 2.C.10, 4.A.3).*

### **Report on the Ad Hoc Self-Evaluation Report: Assessment Response to NWCCU 2011**

The self-study report focused on the institution's progress in implementing full-cycle assessment of student learning outcomes. It included a timeline for activities associated with assessment since the Spring, 2011 visit. The report highlighted processes that were both faculty-driven and transparent. The institution reported changes in administrative leadership for guiding ongoing and future assessment practices. The report also addressed progress in assessment of student learning outcomes in Baccalaureate Core, undergraduate and graduate programs.

The team found the report well organized and comprehensive for the purpose of this review. Team members were provided access to the data included on the assessment web site. Much of the evidence to support statements included in the report was readily accessible on the institution's web site. In face to face meetings, the team was able to gain insight into areas where there appeared to be incomplete information.

### **On-site, face to face meetings:**

Edward Ray, President

Sabah Randhawa, Provost and Executive Vice President

Becky Warner, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

Academic Programs, Assessment, and Accreditation staff

- Bill Bogley, Director
- Stefani Dawn, Assistant Director, Assessment
- Lois Brooks, Vice Provost for Information Services
- Sal Castillo, Director, Institutional Research

Deans (7)

Faculty (~30, by open campus invitation)

Undergraduate students (~20, by open campus invitation)

Graduate students (~25, by open campus invitation)

Representatives of Undergraduate programs (9, including the Cascade Campus)

Baccalaureate Core Committee (5)

Representatives of Graduate Programs (7, including the Cascade Campus)

**Findings related to accelerated efforts to foster, support and reward meaningful assessment of learning outcomes:**

**Fostering, supporting, and rewarding meaningful assessment:** The institution has demonstrated evidence that a culture of assessment has been fostered and supported with institutional resources. There appears to be sufficient central leadership for the support of learning outcome assessment. The Provost articulated accountability of the deans for assessment equivalent to other priorities (e.g., time to graduation and fund-raising).

Faculty and staff are working hard on learning outcome assessment to varying levels of success, reward, buy-in, and fatigue. Faculty development related to assessment is occurring but could reach more broadly and deeply. New assessment grants are limited to two units and the once a year celebration related to assessment provides token rewards and infrequent role model visibility.

The institution will need to align learning outcome assessment into the new accreditation process (i.e., fit with core themes, planning, budgeting). There are many output measures related to learning outcome assessment in the institution's Core Theme 1 but no statement that students should achieve the stated learning objectives.

**Student learning outcomes for courses:** Searches of the institution's website for course syllabi found that courses in the Baccalaureate Core were consistently easily accessible and included statements of learning outcomes for students.

Many departments have easily accessible course syllabi. A review of those syllabi indicated that most include course-specific learning outcomes. Course syllabi for graduate and undergraduate courses in some departments/programs were not accessible on the web. Conversations with faculty indicated that syllabi for all courses include student learning outcomes and those we could not find are posted on the Blackboard LMS system and are accessible only to students who enroll in these courses. Students indicated that course syllabi generally include learning outcomes. The review team is concerned that limiting syllabi access to enrolled students may not adequately satisfy adequate "publishing" of learning outcomes, for the benefit of student considering enrolling in a course.

**Student learning outcomes for programs:** One powerful tool that has been implemented to track program assessment is the *BEAVERS Learning Outcome Tracking System*. In this database, data entry is form-based so that units list their learning outcomes, report which outcomes they are assessing in the current year, what measures were used, what the outcome was, and how the outcome will be used. The form is clear and easy to use. There is reasonably good representation of units filling out the forms although a sampling of reports indicates that there is inconsistency in progress and a heavy reliance on indirect assessment. Many units reported assessment activities that are related to student learning outcomes but do not provide at least some measure of direct assessment.

**Student Learning Outcomes for the Baccalaureate Core:** There are clear student learning outcomes for the Core program, they are adequately communicated to the campus community, and Core assessments are being reported. The assessment model is heavily faculty dependent and course based. Core course

syllabi are approved by an inclusive process that includes faculty, units, Core representatives and the Assistant Director of Assessment. The syllabus for each Core course indicates which Core learning outcome(s) will be addressed in the course and the course instructor assesses that outcome. These individual core assessments are then fed up to the Core Committee using a web-form. With data from student and faculty perceptions of student achievement of the learning outcomes, the Core Committee has a schedule of reviewing individual Core outcomes by category. They also have a plan for mapping whether sufficient Core courses are offered so that the array of courses taken by students covers all of the Core learning outcomes. Core Committee members expressed confidence that that this individual course-based model will adequately determine whether students have met the Core learning outcomes by the time students complete the Core. While team members were concerned that there is no direct assessment of the achievement of Core learning outcomes at the completion of core education, the process is still in a formative stage and may result in a highly successful model.

The institution has a set of LEAP-based learning outcomes for all students separate from the Baccalaureate Core. The team found significant ambiguity related to the relationship and assessment of the learning outcomes for all students, the Baccalaureate Core, and program learning outcomes.

**Student Learning Outcomes for the Undergraduate Programs:** While some undergraduate programs do not have their program learning outcomes available on the institution's web site, most identify them in the BEAVERS system. Most also have posted the results of assessment activities and actions which will be taken with an eye towards program improvement. The team found many examples of authentic and meaningful learning assessment and completion of the cycle of assessment. Some programs have stated learning outcomes but assessed curriculum variables and modified their curriculum based on other than student learning outcomes. Some programs have only used evidence from indirect assessment (e.g., grades, student exit surveys) to guide their decisions. The Assistant Director, Assessment will be working with individual units to refine their assessment process.

**Student Learning Outcomes for the Graduate programs:** Learning outcomes have been developed for both Masters and Doctoral programs. Most programs have also developed programmatic outcomes, often adopting the general graduate program learning outcomes. Comprehensive rubrics have been developed for faculty to directly assess specific learning outcomes at various stages of a student's progress to degree (e.g., during a student's oral thesis or dissertation defense). Data are being collected and there is evidence that changes are being made to graduate education at the institution as a result (e.g., increased focus on education in ethics). Graduate students interviewed indicated that they feel supported and are having conversations about their learning with department faculty. This perception was significantly weaker for students in interdisciplinary programs.

#### **Commendations:**

1. During the past 18 months, great progress has been made with graduate learning assessment. Rubrics to evaluate student performance on particular metrics of the qualifying and thesis/dissertation defense exams are leading to conversations with students and with department colleagues about how to improve learning outcomes.

2. During the past 18 months there has been strong accomplishment in building an infrastructure to support learning outcome assessment and closing the loop on assessment. Especially impressive are the hiring of Stephanie Dawn and the new BEAVERS Assessment Tracking System. The deans have also been providing either new staff or additional responsibilities for existing staff related to learning assessment. There has been clear investment of resources in support of meaningful assessment.

**Recommendations:**

1. The review team found assessment efforts to be well-organized and moving forward in all three areas of undergraduate and graduate education and the Baccalaureate Core, but in a fragile state, as some aspects of the system are very new. There has been substantial turnover in staffing related to assessment and some apparent assessment weariness on the part of faculty. The review team recommends continued progress in sustaining and enhancing the efforts that have begun. (2.C.2, 2.C.3, 2.C.10)
2. The team recommends the use of learning assessment to demonstrate the achievement of stated learning outcomes (i.e., using direct assessment and use of the resulting data to close the loop on assessment) (4.A.3)