

Ad-Hoc/Special Evaluation

Peer-Evaluation Report

Oregon State University

Corvallis, Oregon

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NWCCU Liaison to the Peer Evaluation Team:

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

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Introduction

A one-person evaluation team conducted an *Ad Hoc* visit to Oregon State University (OSU) on April 6, 2023. The team was supported by Dr. Gita Bangera of NWCCU, who served as the official Commission liaison to the team. The visit covered Recommendation 1 from the Spring 2022 Mid-Cycle Review and Recommendation 2 from the Spring 2019 Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability review, as per the July 25, 2022 NWCCU letter to the institution.

Ad Hoc Report and Supporting Materials

On February 17 Oregon State University submitted a 16-page report and appendix, along with the OSU Academic Catalog 2022-2023, and the OSU Multiple Locations and Modalities Tracking Spreadsheet 2022. In response to requests from the team, prior to the visit, OSU also submitted course syllabi; a description of the Baccalaureate Core Assessment structure and process; example letters from the Faculty Senate Baccalaureate Core Committee informing deans of course review and recertification process results for course inclusion in the Baccalaureate Core; an internal Academic Unit Assessment operational document; snapshots from the Academic Unit Assessment Dashboards; example reports, results and responses from the Academic Unit Assessment process; and examples of (program student learning) assessment reports and feedback.

The *Ad Hoc* report addresses Recommendation 1 from the Spring 2022 Mid-Cycle Review and Recommendation 2 from the Spring 2019 Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability review, as appropriate to the scope of the evaluation. The appendix includes four examples of how programs use assessment data to inform decision-making and to guide program and student support services improvements. The report is well-organized and includes numerous and helpful links to policies and documents, as well as links to websites with additional information and data. Some links lead to sites requiring log in, so the documentation was not accessible to the evaluation team. In response to specific requests, the institution readily made the documentation available in the NWCCU virtual work space. Taken together with the additional supporting materials, the report provides extensive documentation of the many completed and ongoing efforts related to the two recommendations.

Given the comprehensive nature of the report and supporting materials, the evaluation team was able to use the site visit to confirm practices, fill in some gaps in understanding the ongoing and new processes, and focus on how the new processes are playing out.

Visit Summary

The one-day visit was conducted on the Oregon State University campus in Corvallis, and the evaluation team met with numerous groups and individuals across the institution, including from the OSU-Cascades campus.

The following twenty six individuals attended sessions: president; provost and executive vice president; vice provost for Academic Affairs, senior vice provost and accreditation liaison officer; interim vice president, OSU-Cascades; assistant vice provost, Assessment and Accreditation; vice provost and dean of the Graduate School; a group of four deans of colleges; associate provost, Ecampus; a group of four associate deans of the colleges; institutional-level staff working on assessment, the Baccalaureate Core, and curriculum; five faculty members from across the institution; and the associate vice president of Budget and Resource Planning.

Sessions were held for: Planning, Decision Making and Allocation of Resources (Institutional level); Planning, Decision Making and Allocation of Resources (Colleges and OSU-Cascades); Integration of Assessment Findings; Academic Program Assessment (Administration); Academic Program Assessment (Faculty Assessment Leads); and Budgeting and Strategic Planning.

Recommendation [1]:

Recommendation 1: Spring 2022 Mid-Cycle Review - Use the results of student learning outcomes assessment more consistently for improvement by informing planning, decision-making, and allocation of resources and capacity. (2020 Standard(s) 1.D.3; 1.D.4)

Standard 1.D.3 The institution's disaggregated indicators of student achievement should be widely published and available on the institution's website. Such disaggregated indicators should be aligned with meaningful, institutionally identified indicators benchmarked against indicators for peer institutions at the regional and national levels and be used for continuous improvement to inform planning, decision making, and allocation of resources.

Standard 1.D.4 The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing indicators of student achievement are transparent and are used to inform and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity.

The connecting Standard, as per the NWCCU liaison, is *1.C.7 The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes.*

Progress on Recommendation [1]

To clarify how OSU is addressing Standards 1.D.3 and 1.D.4 and to make the connection between the OSU student achievement metrics related to 1.D.3 and 1.D.4 and student learning, the report describes how OSU makes publicly available, analyzes, reports on and integrates into decision making a defined set of university strategic indicators and performance measures. Some of these indicators and measures are

used for comparison against similar indicators at peer institutions. Target levels and the closing of equity gaps are connected to key actions in OSU's Strategic Plan 4:0: Transformation, Excellence and Impact.

On the academic side, two of the strategic indicators, retention and graduation rates, are integrated into a newly launched Academic Unit Assessment (AUA) process. This biennial comprehensive process of all eleven colleges, plus the Graduate School and Honors College, implemented in 2022 after the NWCCU mid-cycle evaluation process, includes data about enrollment, first year retention, degree completion, and time-to-degree for graduate programs, among other information. Dashboards for this process have been developed, and the dashboards include, among other things, information about retention and graduation rates disaggregated by campus, gender, racial/ethnic group, domestic/international, Pell-eligible, and first-generation. While the data can be disaggregated to the program-level, so that resulting improvement actions can be specific to the program and students in that program, the unit of review is the college as a whole. In addition to the data provided via the dashboards, the process incorporates qualitative data, for example, from student learning outcomes assessment, from a Climate Survey, from an Inclusive Excellence Inventory, from the Academic Analytics Scholarly Research Index, and from a summary of each program's curricular currency. The four areas of review are: Student Success (incorporating student learning as well as disaggregated metrics of student achievement); Research and Scholarship; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (including for students, faculty, and staff); and Using Resources Efficiently.

The Office of the Provost synthesizes the array of data and information and produces a summary and talking points, which then serves as the basis of conversations with college leadership. If there are remaining questions, the college has an opportunity to respond, before a final set of recommendations are made. In the end, the provost's office and college work on an action plan to implement any next steps and identified improvements, which can range, for example, from further research on an issue, to an external review of a specific program, to changes in a program's status, to improvements in the assessment of student learning. In this way, OSU brings together ongoing annual student learning outcomes assessment with progress on key student achievement metrics and other measures of program effectiveness and efficiency in a holistic, ongoing process of continuous improvement that replaces and streamlines earlier versions of cyclical program review.

The AUA process is meant to align accountability and authority and engages department and college leaders who have the ability to allocate and reallocate resources. While the logistics of the implementation are still evolving, the institution is already seeing benefits from the first implementation. The deans, leaders from Ecampus and the OSU-Cascades campus, and the associate deans expressed an appreciation for the holistic nature of the process. They also expressed an appreciation for the tone of the process, which they stated is one of inquiry, support and assistance. The process has encouraged and reinvigorated conversations and collaborations across the different campuses. As stated in the report, another example of a significant outcome of the process is that the deans now have a comprehensive view of the state of program student learning outcomes assessment within their units. Student learning and its assessment are thus highlighted in a new way and brought to the attention of leaders with the authority and resources to support improvements. As the institution continues to implement this new process, leadership will want to think about how the new process is communicated with faculty, who seemed less familiar with this first implementation.

The assessment of student learning is central to Recommendation 1. In particular, the recommendation focuses on the use of student learning outcomes assessment to inform planning, decision-making, and the allocation of resources and capacity. In September 2021, OSU embarked on a broad and inclusive *Undergraduate Program Assessment Revision Project*, which was completed in December 2022, after the April NWCCU mid-cycle evaluation. As stated in the *Ad Hoc* report, the goals of the project were to simplify the assessment processes, refocus faculty efforts toward reflection and action, and enhance the use of assessment results to support teaching, pedagogy and student success. An effort to integrate more direct assessment of student learning is underway, and both associate deans and faculty expressed appreciation for guidance and assistance provided by the recently hired Director of Assessment, who reports to the Assistant Vice Provost for Assessment and Accreditation. A section on *Actions and Reflection* has been added to the assessment report template for both undergraduate and graduate programs. These templates integrate a curriculum map, the ongoing approach to assessing the student learning outcomes, and the specific annual report, therefore serving both as the assessment plan for the program and the mechanism for annual assessment reporting.

Two other resulting changes in the assessment process are that 1) undergraduate programs now report on all learning outcomes on a two-year rather than five-year cycle, and 2) assessment reports for all programs are now due in the fall, rather than the spring. Participants in the meetings expressed full support of these changes and provided a range of reasons these changes are meaningful and helpful to them in the work they are doing.

The institution also developed a Program Assessment Report Evaluation rubric, which is used to evaluate the quality and completeness of a program's assessment process. Assessment staff use the rubric to evaluate a program's assessment process and produce a report that rates each of ten items on a four-point scale: Beginning (1), Developing (2), Established (3) and Robust (4). The rubric was implemented in June 2022. In Fall 2022 aggregated college-level data from these reports were shared broadly with faculty and staff engaged with assessment. The data also were summarized across all programs for the purposes of the *Ad Hoc* report. By doing so, the institution learned that, as a whole, the institution scored the highest across all programs on the item "Outcomes are specific and measurable." This is significant for Recommendation 2 below. The institution also found that the assessment processes in graduate programs are not as mature as those in undergraduate programs, and that a continued focus on the *Actions and Reflections* part of assessment, sometimes also known as closing the loop, is in order on the graduate level.

On the institutional level, student credit hour production, which the institution associates with retention, and completions are considered in the Shared Responsibility Budget Model process that allocates resources to the colleges. The colleges then determine further allocations, and the different processes described above are aimed at ensuring that the assessment of student learning, progress on student success measures, and the closing of equity gaps are important to those decisions. An example of an improvement informed by data related to student success and to student learning is the implementation of learning assistants in MATH classes. Due to the new AUA process, which encourages new ways of looking across programs, this best practice in MATH was noted by Ecampus, which now is exploring how it might replicate it in online classes. Another example of a best practice implemented to improve student learning and success is the faculty-student mentoring initiative, which is working to move the needle on student success and is now being scaled up.

The evaluation team observed several significant steps the institution has taken to more explicitly articulate and integrate the use of assessment results into ongoing processes for planning, decision making, and the allocation of resources and capacity. The updated program assessment reporting templates include an element on actions and reflection, and individual programs are evaluated on how well they are meeting this element. The *Ad Hoc* report includes four examples of how programs are making decisions and improvements informed by assessment results. The rubric used to measure the quality and completeness of all undergraduate and graduate Annual Assessment Reports includes an element “Assessment activities lead to changes designed to improve student learning; timeline for implementation is detailed.” The institution is using aggregated data from the rubric to help focus its assessment efforts on full cycle assessment.

The new Academic Unit Assessment process, which results in action plans for the colleges, includes program outcomes assessment as an integral part of the overall success of the college. The institution provided AUA examples, which document that student learning assessment is integrated into the process.

The evaluation team was provided with documentation that the institution has made strong progress in laying the groundwork to demonstrate that it uses the results of student learning outcomes assessment for improvement by informing planning, decision-making, and allocation of resources and capacity on the program, college, and institutional level.

Recommendation [2]:

Recommendation 2: Spring 2019 Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability - Continue to exercise great care that credit and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, are based on documented student achievement of the established Oregon State University learning outcomes. (2020 Standard(s) 1.C.2)

Standard 1.C.2 *The institution awards credit, degrees, certificates, or credentials for programs that are based upon student learning and learning outcomes that offer an appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning.*

Progress on Recommendation [2]

Building on previous efforts to standardize student learning outcomes and their implementation across all offerings of a course or program, in November 2022 the Curriculum Council of the Faculty Senate approved a Student Learning Outcomes policy that formalizes what had been accepted, but informal practice. The policy requires all courses and programs to have established student learning outcomes, which must be measurable and assessed in a systematic manner. Course student learning outcomes must be listed on every syllabus and must match for all section of the course, regardless of location, modality, and instruction. The policy addresses appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning by requiring an appropriate number of student learning outcomes that clearly articulate what students should achieve.

The institution implements and monitors compliance with this policy in several ways. The recently implemented Curriculum Inventory Management (CIM) system provides the platform for the proposal, review, approval, and archiving of learning outcomes. To assist faculty prior to submitting course or program learning outcomes, resources for writing student learning outcomes are provided on the

Curriculum Management/Assessment and Accreditation website, and staff are available for individual meetings and group workshops with faculty across locations.

Course learning outcomes are archived in the CIM system, to which OSU faculty, regardless of campus or modality of teaching, have access. These learning outcomes are to be consistently implemented across all offerings of a course and published in the course syllabi for students. A review by the evaluation team of example syllabi confirmed consistency of learning outcomes across the syllabi, regardless of location or modality. The institution also has undertaken an ambitious university-wide review of existing course outcomes. The institution notes that bringing together faculty from across locations and modalities to discuss course student learning outcomes promises long-term positive impacts on the program level as well.

All undergraduate, as of 2019, and graduate, as of Winter 2023, program student learning outcomes are published in the catalog, where students and other stakeholders have ready access to them. Aggregating the data from the new Program Assessment Report Evaluation Rubric across all programs, as illustrated on pg. 6 of the report, “Outcomes are specific and measurable” currently ranks as the highest achieved out of ten desired elements of program assessment for both undergraduate and graduate programs. The revised assessment reporting templates and the Program Assessment Report Evaluation Rubric also include review elements for programs offered at multiple locations and across modalities, ensuring that all student achievement of the outcomes is assessed. The aggregated data show that this is the next highest achieved element of program assessment for undergraduate programs. An additional tool, the *Multiple Locations and Modalities Tracking Spreadsheet*, provides another view of the status of program assessment across locations and modalities. Assessment staff use the spreadsheet to identify programs that may need follow up assistance. Of note, workshops offered by assessment staff in Winter 2023 include a specific focus on best practices for working across multiple locations and modalities.

The institution is well into a multi-year process of establishing and implementing a new general education curriculum, the learning outcomes for which are at the Faculty Senate for approval this spring. These outcomes will be published in the 2026 catalog, and student learning in the different categories will be assessed by the faculty teaching the courses and by the Faculty Senate Baccalaureate Core Committee, as is the current practice. Next year faculty will determine what the assessment process for the new general education curriculum will look like, and how the results of that process will be disseminated and effect improvements. Documents shared with the evaluation team provide evidence of the rigorous, ongoing review of course learning outcomes and the assessments used to measure student achievement of those outcomes for the current Baccalaureate Core. Given that the final implementation of the new general education curriculum is scheduled for AY26, the institution will want to think about how it will demonstrate assessment of the Baccalaureate Core/general education curriculum during this transition period.

The evaluation team observed a number of steps OSU has taken to ensure and demonstrate that the institution awards credit, degrees, certificates, or credentials for programs that are based upon student learning and learning outcomes that offer an appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning. The evaluation team was provided clear and convincing evidence that undergraduate and graduate programs have specific and measurable outcomes. The evaluation team also was provided evidence that the institution has taken significant action toward measuring the student learning of these

outcomes across locations and modalities. Therefore, the evaluation team finds strong progress on Recommendation 2.

Conclusion

The evaluation team found evidence that the institution has made considerable progress in addressing both Recommendation 1 and Recommendation 2.

Some highlights are:

The institution has invested in assessment in important ways, including in college and institutional-level personnel, processes and infrastructure.

The institution presented examples of how it is using assessment results and student achievement data to inform resource allocation.

The new Academic Unit Assessment (AUA) process overall is seen as a step in a positive direction, bringing the evaluation of programs into the broader context of the colleges and allowing for the focused allocation of time, effort and resources aimed at improvement.

In part due to the AUA process deans are being brought into conversations about student learning outcomes assessment in new ways.

There are many ways that OSU is encouraging and supporting cooperation across locations and modalities. This includes the assessment of student learning.

The institution embarked on an Undergraduate Student Success Initiative in 2017 aimed at narrowing equity gaps and focusing on underrepresented students and students with high financial need. A notable result of this effort is that OSU is implementing a Financial Readiness and Success plan for all students.

The institution's new strategic planning implementation presents an opportunity to align efforts around student learning and student success and to articulate even more clearly how they relate to planning, decision making and the allocation of resources.

Some areas to consider:

As the institution continues to implement the adjusted and new processes, it will want to continue to think about how the institution demonstrates that the results of its assessment efforts inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes.