

Year One Peer-Evaluation Report

**Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR**

May 15, 2012

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

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Roster of Evaluators

Chair: Ms. Megan Carlson, Assistant Vice Provost
University of Alaska Anchorage

Dr. Muriel Oaks, Dean Emeritus
Washington State University

Introduction

In August 2011, Oregon State University was notified that its accreditation had been reaffirmed on the basis of their Spring 2011 Comprehensive Evaluation. The Commission requested the Year One Self-Evaluation Report, due in Spring 2012, be expanded to include an addendum addressing Recommendation 2 of the Spring 2011 Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation Report. The Year One Self-Evaluation report was submitted by the institution in March 2012, and reviewed by a panel of evaluators in March and April of that year. An Ad Hoc Self-Evaluation Report with a visit in Fall 2012 is also planned in Fall 2012 to address Recommendation 1 of the Spring 2011 Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation Report.

Assessment of the Institution's Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The institution's self-evaluation report is helpful in describing the institutional context, purpose, operating environment, as well as how they are addressing decreasing state appropriations. Oregon State University is unique, one of only two universities in the nation to have Land Grant, Sea Grant, Space Grant, and Sun Grant designations. OSU also has a sizable impact on the state of Oregon, approaching \$2 billion and rising, and is recognized for its top-ranked research and community engagement activities.

The institution is in a period of considerable change and realignment, bringing similar units together and sunseting degree programs with low enrollments and innovations. By responding to cuts in state appropriations with increased research funding, tuition, and private giving, they continue to move forward by increasing enrollments, faculty, research funding, and facilities to support the mission.

Commendation: The institution is commended for its progress in making significant changes in academic structure and programs to align with and advance its strategic plan.

There are some areas where the report could be modified to add clarity for evaluators. The table demonstrating the alignment of the core theme indicators with system and Oregon Education Investment Board indicators is part of the addendum, and thus presented before the core theme indicators themselves. In future reports, the institution should consider presenting the core theme objectives and indicators in a similar table, placed in close proximity to the above referenced table. In addition, an appendix or footnotes reflecting the many links in the report would improve readability for evaluators reviewing hard copies or electronic copies without internet access.

Addendum on Indicators and Mission Fulfillment

In Spring 2011, the Commission made two recommendations for Oregon State University. Recommendation One, related to assessing learning outcomes across course, program, and degree levels, is scheduled for an Ad Hoc Self-Evaluation Report and site visit in Fall 2012. Since this will be the subject of an upcoming report and site visit, it will not be addressed in detail in this evaluation. The institution is working to address this recommendation, adding graduate assessment plans to the existing student learning outcome assessment website.

Personnel have been brought on board to lead the expansion of assessment activities, and events have been held to share best practices among OSU faculty.

Recommendation Two, related to indicators and mission fulfillment, was addressed in an addendum in the current Self-Evaluation Report. The 2011 recommendation is provided below for context.

The institution did not fully use assessment results to make determinations of mission fulfillment (Standard 5.A.2). The evaluation committee recommends that the institution work to refine the indicators for each core theme, ensure that measures are in place for each, collect and analyze data relative to the indicators, and fully articulate the relationship between the indicators and mission fulfillment (Standard 4.A.1 and 4.B.1).

The initial indicators were developed by a steering committee over a short period of time after the adoption of the new accreditation standards, so the committee chose to focus on available data wherever possible. OSU was encouraged to reconsider their indicators to align them more closely with their core themes.

Since 2011, two major activities have affected the institution's indicators: an effort to establish a performance compact with the Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB) to meet the state's goals for degree completion, and a mission alignment exercise undertaken within the Oregon University System (OUS) designed to demonstrate mission fulfillment and alignment with State Board of Higher Education outcomes. The revision of core themes, objectives, and indicators was guided by these processes, which will provide meaningful information for internal assessment while demonstrating mission fulfillment to the state of Oregon. Progress with regard to the Core Theme indicators will be discussed in greater detail in section 1.B below.

Eligibility Requirements Two and Three

The institution clearly demonstrates that it is authorized to operate as a higher education institution by Oregon Revised Statutes, as required by Eligibility Requirement Two.

The OSU mission was approved by the Oregon State Board of Higher Education in 2011. Less clear is the approval of the institution's core themes by its Board. *Concern: The institution should include its approval of the core themes by the Oregon State Board of Higher Education in its next report, or take necessary action to obtain that approval if it has not yet been granted.* (Eligibility Requirement 3)

Section One: Standard One Findings

Standard 1.A.1 Mission

The institution has presented its mission through a mission statement, and vision and goals of the strategic plan. As stated above, the mission was approved by the State Board in 2011. The essential elements of the mission are translated into three Core Themes, discussed in 1.B below: Undergraduate Education, Research and Graduate Education, and Outreach and Engagement.

Standard 1.A.2 Mission Fulfillment

Mission fulfillment is achieved when OSU meets “its commitment on the performance compact with the OEIB and the OUS as outlined” in the table on page 8 of the self-evaluation report. The indicators in the compact address student success, workforce development, research, and outreach. The institution intends to track all of the Core Theme indicators, but many “represent inputs or process measures and contribute to outcome measures in the compact.” One area that appears to be missing from the definition of mission fulfillment is data on student learning. The recommendation on the use of student learning outcomes data is repeated in Section 1.B.2 because it relates to both mission fulfillment and core themes.

Recommendation: As program assessment is systematized and developed, the institution should incorporate evidence of student learning outcomes data throughout the educational experience and within academic programs into the evaluation of both Core Themes and Mission Fulfillment. (Standard 1.A.2, 1.B.2)

The articulation of an acceptable threshold for mission fulfillment is unclear. Instead of being directly connected to the OEIB compact, as the interpretation of mission fulfillment suggests, the report states that OSU defines targets annually for key outcome measures including enrollment and graduation, retention and graduation rates, sponsored research, and student diversity targets. There does not appear to be a clear link between this list and the OEIB list of indicators.

Recommendation: As the institution begins its revisions for the next report, it should clarify the definition of mission fulfillment and its connection to the Core Theme indicators, and articulate an acceptable threshold. (Standard 1.A.2)

Standard 1.B Core Themes

The essential elements of the mission are translated into Core Themes focusing on (1) Undergraduate Education, (2) Graduate Education and Research, and (3) Outreach and Engagement. The rationale for these core themes as primary components of the institution’s mission is well developed within the discussion of each Core Theme. However, OSU’s unique status as a land-, sea-, space-, and sun-grant institution appears to be missing from the core themes and subsequent objectives. Also absent are the “signature areas of distinction” from the mission, vision, and goals. As the institution continues to refine its suite of core themes, objectives, and indicators, it may wish to consider whether they effectively reflect OSU’s distinctive attributes.

Standard 1.B.2 Core Theme Objectives and Indicators

The three essential components of the mission make up the Core Themes. These Core Themes are further developed into 8 objectives, with approximately 37 indicators used to measure these objectives.¹ Each objective is fleshed out to identify its rationale and any areas for specific attention (such as ethnicity, urban-rural status, and first-generation college status).

Rationales help to provide a link between core themes, objectives, and indicators, as well as to demonstrate how the indicators are meaningful and assessable. The indicators represent a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, such as graduation rates and alumni satisfaction surveys. While the objectives and indicators are on the whole appropriate, the institution may wish to consider the inclusion of process and input indicators in the assessment of core themes. As the report acknowledges that many of the indicators “represent inputs or process measures and contribute to outcome measures in the compact,” they may represent important activities in the institution but not actively inform planning, evaluation of institutional effectiveness, and resource allocation.

Commendation: The institution is commended for clearly linking the use of indicators with resource allocation, policies, and services, which places the institution in good position for future reports.

While the suite of indicators is generally appropriate to the number of Core Themes and objectives, it appears that the indicators currently do not include evidence of student learning. Processes related to student learning, such as programs completing student learning outcomes assessment, are not sufficient to directly demonstrate that students are learning.

Recommendation: As program assessment is systematized and developed, the institution should incorporate evidence of student learning outcomes data throughout the educational experience and within academic programs into the evaluation of both Core Themes and Mission Fulfillment. (Standard 1.A.2, 1.B.2)

¹ Several indicators include subsets, such as indicator 1.1.1, which includes applicants, admits, and first-time enrolls.

Summary

The Year One Self-Evaluation Report demonstrates that Oregon State University is making significant progress in identifying what it sets out to do, assuring that it is properly resourced and organized to accomplish those goals, and establishing methods to evaluate its performance and make improvements. It is well-positioned to continue mindfully through this accreditation process, and to connect its efforts to meet the needs of the State of Oregon with its accreditation efforts.

Commendations

1. The institution is commended for its progress in making significant changes in academic structure and programs to align with and advance its strategic plan.
2. The institution is commended for clearly linking the use of indicators with resource allocation, policies, and services, which places the institution in good position for future reports.

Recommendations

1. Recommendation: As the institution begins its revisions for the next report, it should clarify the definition of mission fulfillment and its connection to the Core Theme indicators, and articulate an acceptable threshold. (Standard 1.A.2)
2. Recommendation: As program assessment is systematized and developed, the institution should incorporate evidence of student learning outcomes data throughout the educational experience and within academic programs into the evaluation of both Core Themes and Mission Fulfillment. (Standard 1.A.2, 1.B.2)