

# **Year One Peer-Evaluation Report**

## **Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology**

**Great Falls, Montana**

**March 1 - May 10, 2011**

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

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## **Roster of Peer Evaluators**

**Mr. John W. Hughes** (Chair)

Chairman, Education Department  
College of Southern Idaho  
Twin Falls, Idaho

**Ms. Wendy L. Hall**

Director of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment  
Lower Columbia College  
Longview, Washington

**Dr. Steven Albiston**

Vice President of Instruction and Student Affairs  
Eastern Idaho Technical College  
Idaho Falls, Idaho

## Introduction

Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology is a comprehensive community college located in north central Montana, in the city of Great Falls. The College serves a five-county area and has been affiliated with Montana State University since 1994. Over the past few years, the Institution has experienced a substantial surge in enrollment. The College completed academic year 2010 at just over 1,300 FTE.

From March 1 to May 10, 2011, a three-person peer-evaluation team from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (Commission) conducted a year one comprehensive peer evaluation of Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology in an off-site virtual environment. The structure of the evaluation consisted of a virtual organizational meeting and virtual evaluation meetings through audio conferencing authorized by the Commission. The peer evaluation was conducted based upon the Commission's 2010 Accreditation Standards and Eligibility Requirements.

Since the last regular accreditation visit in April 2010, one substantive change, regarding the transition of operations in the Gallatin Valley (now called the Gallatin College Programs), has been submitted.

### Report on Recommendation 1

Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology hosted a regular interim evaluation in April of 2010. The Evaluation Committee gave three commendations and one recommendation. The Commission informed the College that in reaffirming accreditation it found that the recommendation was "an area where the College was substantially in compliance with Commission criteria for accreditation, but in need of improvement." The Commission requested that the College address Recommendation 1 in an addendum to the Year One Self-Evaluation Report. Recommendation 1 is as follows:

While Montana State University–Great Falls College of Technology has made substantial progress in a faculty driven assessment, it is recommended that additional work be done to achieve a regular and systematic assessment of program outcomes that demonstrate student achievement of outcomes and improvement of teaching and learning. (Standard 2.A.5, 2.B.2, 2.B.3)

Montana State University-Great Falls responded to Recommendation 1 by providing an addendum and several appendices in its *Year One Self-Evaluation Report*. The Peer-Evaluation Committee based its evaluation and determination on this narrative response with respect to the Standards now in effect.

According to the *Self-Evaluation Report*, since the fall of 2006, the College has developed a strong foundation of student learning outcomes assessment by tying course and program student learning outcomes to eight institutional learning outcomes defined as the 8 Abilities. Progress toward the achievement of the 8 Abilities is measured through a

respective core indicator of effectiveness. Once data is gathered from the core indicator, faculty can then use the results to improve teaching and learning at the course and program level. This cycle of assessment has been developed as evidenced through a four-phase process:

- Phase I: 8 Abilities aligned in the college divisions with all associate and certificate programs.
- Phase II: Evidence of alignment to the 8 Abilities.
- Phase III: Alignment of course objectives to division and all associate and certificate programs.
- Phase IV: Evidence of alignment of student learning objectives to division and associate and certificate programs.

As documented in the *Regular Interim Report* (April of 2010), the Evaluation Committee recognized that much work had been done in the assessment of student learning outcomes, but noted that “the process has not yet culminated in a full assessment cycle.”

Since the 2010 *Regular Interim Report*, the College continued its commitment to assessing student learning by accomplishing several short-term goals. These included, for example, trainings and workshops on student learning outcomes, outcomes terminology, and the College’s student learning outcomes assessment model. The College also implemented an evaluation component on faculty evaluations for faculty participation and commitment to the assessment of student learning outcomes.

Two additional short-term goals that the College completed support Phase III and Phase IV of the four-phase process bulleted above. In support of Phase III, the Outcomes Assessment Team (OAT) secured support from the College’s Curriculum Committee to embed outcomes assessment alignment of course objectives to program/degree/division outcomes and the 8 Abilities in all course syllabi. In Appendix K of the *Year One Self-Evaluation Report*, the College provided a personal nutrition syllabus as evidence. Course objectives, alignment with program/degree/division outcomes, assessment tool, and alignment to the 8 Abilities were clearly articulated. (Standard 2.C.2)

In support of Phase III and Phase IV, the College developed a Phase IV Assessment Form that aligns course objectives to program/degree/division outcomes and to the type of learning objective (introduce, reinforce, emphasize) to which the course instructor or director is striving. Additionally, the form identifies the course assessment tool utilized to measure the course objective, identifies data results from the assessment, and identifies the instructor’s action plan based upon assessment data. In short, the Phase IV Assessment Form provides the course instructor or director the opportunity to document student achievement and to document how assessment results will be used to continue or to modify the student learning pathway. (Standard 4.A.2)

Concern:

1. The College has shown that it has a faculty-driven student learning outcomes assessment process, as evidenced by the development of the 8 Institutional Abilities and the development of the four-phase student learning outcomes assessment process. To validate the assessment process, the College needs to provide evidence of student learning outcomes assessment data for courses, programs, and degrees and needs to provide evidence that assessment data shows that students who complete courses, programs, and degrees have achieved the respective student learning outcomes. (Standards 4.A.3, 4.B.2)

## **Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report**

The Peer-Evaluation Committee received the College's *Year One Self-Evaluation Report* in a timely manner. In an email, the College's Accreditation Liaison Officer provided the Committee with an electronic link to the College's catalog.

The report included an introduction, an institutional context, and a preface, which gave the Committee a general overview of the College, its basic tenets, and recent institutional changes.

The Committee found that the report could have been more organized and evidence for Eligibility Requirement 3 and Standard 1.B.2 more clearly articulated. Moreover, the Committee found the numbering system of the core indicators initially confusing (due at least in part to the fact that the indicators are dispersed throughout the Core Themes rather than listed in order). This was substantially clarified after a review of Appendix B. The evaluators particularly liked the complete description of each indicator in Appendix B, which also included a rationale. It would have been helpful to include a numbered list (in order) of the core indicators at the beginning of the narrative on the Institution's Core Themes rather than in Appendix B.

Several additional appendices provided visual support for the narrative in the report, including the strategic plan (Appendix C), graphic representation of outcomes assessment of student learning pathways (Appendix D), timeline (Appendix F), several templates created for mapping and tracking progress on assessment of student learning outcomes (Appendices E and G-H), and a recent performance report card (Appendix L).

## **Report on Eligibility Requirements**

The Evaluation Committee understood that the Commission's request to provide an Executive Summary of Eligibility Requirements (ER) 2 and 3 was a late addition to the guidelines for writing the Year One Self-Evaluation Report. Thus, the Committee encourages Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology to follow the guidelines released in March of 2011 to ensure that its next report addresses the ERs as noted in the guidelines.

Montana State University–Great Falls College of Technology is authorized to deliver certificates and degrees by the Montana Board of Regents. (Eligibility Requirement 2)

The Evaluation Committee found the College’s mission and core themes clearly defined and understandable. The mission and core themes reflect the intent of the College and are appropriate for a comprehensive community college. The College’s governing board approved and adopted the College’s core themes in May of 2009. (Eligibility Requirement 3)

## Section One

### **Introduction:**

Montana State University–Great Falls articulated its mission statement in the *Year One Self-Evaluation Report* as “The College’s mission is to foster the success of our students and their communities through innovative, flexible learning opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and aspirations resulting in self-fulfillment and competitiveness in an increasingly global society.” According to the *Year One Report*, the mission identifies three key components for the College: what the College does, for whom, and why. The College’s mission statement is further delineated in the report through four core themes: Workforce Development, Transfer Preparation, Academic Preparation, and Community Development. Each core theme contains objectives, indicators of effectiveness, and rationale.

### **Report on Standard 1.A Mission:**

As noted, the Institution’s mission statement was adopted in May 2009 by the Montana State Board of Regents. It is published in the catalog and appears to set direction, along with the Strategic Plan, for the Institution. The report states that the Strategic Plan, along with the state’s two-year education agenda, guides the College’s divisions in a unified effort to move the College toward accomplishment of its goals. The Strategic Plan is renewed annually. (Standard 1.A.1)

In the Institution’s *Year One Report*, a process for measuring institutional effectiveness through assessing progress toward accomplishing strategic directives (Appendix C) is demonstrated. Under this “performance report card” model, the Institution has quantitatively defined success, or mission fulfillment, as an overall institutional grade of “C” or better.

The Institution has also developed its core themes—Workforce Development, Transfer Preparation, Academic Preparation and Community Development—with corresponding indicators, around its mission. The Evaluation Committee found that as the Institution moves forward with assessment and refinement of the core indicators of effectiveness that they will become an integral part of determination of mission fulfillment. (Standard 1.A.2)

## Report on Standard 1.B Core Themes

The core themes are clearly defined and appear to adequately capture the Institution's mission. The detailed breakout of each core indicator in Appendix B was found to be particularly helpful. (Standard 1.B.1)

The Evaluation Committee found that the core themes, objectives, and indicators, and rationale for the indicators are addressed in the *Self-Evaluation Report*. It is evident from a citation in the report that the core indicators were selected after a review of available research and related literature. Selected indicators include outside benchmarking opportunities, such as the National Community College Benchmarking Project, the CCSSE, and the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE). The Evaluation Committee found that the connection to external sources strengthens the framework overall. (Standard 1.B.2)

Appendix B includes detailed information about methodology and data collection for each of the core indicators. Core Indicator #10: Licensure and Certificate Rates states that methodology is being refined. Core Indicator #11: Employer Satisfaction with Graduates states that a data source/instrument needs to be developed. (Standard 1.B.2)

Concern:

1. The College is encouraged to refine the data collection methodology for Core Indicator 10 and to develop an assessment instrument for evaluating the accomplishment of Core Indicator 11. (Standard 1.B.2)

## Summary

The Evaluation Committee found that Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology has taken great strides in organizing its institutional effectiveness framework in recent years. Developing the core themes, institutional student abilities, indicators, and setting up an Office of Institutional Research are all very positive steps.

The College provided an addendum to its *Year One Report* that included several appendices to document its work in response to Recommendation 1. These enabled the Evaluation Committee to provide an objective evaluation of the Recommendation. While the College has developed a comprehensive system of student achievement, it now needs to provide evidence that data is being collected and needs to provide evidence that the data leads to the enhancement of teaching and student learning.

It is evident that much work has been done around developing general education outcomes (Institutional Student Abilities). Evaluation Committee members encourage the College to continue to develop this area and share the progress that has been made.

## Recommendations

Recommendations:

1. The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College refine data collection methodology and develop effective assessment measurements for core indicators of achievement to ensure that results are measurable for evaluating the accomplishment of the objectives for each core theme. (Standard 1.B.2)
2. While the College has documented a faculty-driven, comprehensive system of assessment of student achievement, the Evaluation Committee recommends that the College provide evidence 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, 4.B.2)\*

\*This recommendation is in response to Recommendation 1 as reported in the addendum to the College's *Year One Self-Evaluation Report*, and thus, the Standards cited in this recommendation reflect the conversion to the 2010 Standards.