

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT

South Puget Sound Community College
Olympia, Washington

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Prepared By

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

Focused Interim Evaluation Report

Introduction

South Puget Community College received its initial start as Olympia Vocational Technical Institute in 1962 as part of Community College Twelve, but still under the direction of the Board of Education of Olympia School District Number 111. The Board of Education of District Number 111 moved toward accreditation of the Technical Institute. Candidacy for accreditation was received in 1972, and by June 1975, initial accreditation was granted. In 1976 the name was changed to Olympia Technical College, and then changed again to South Puget Sound Community College in 1984. Since its initial accreditation, the institution has maintained its accredited status. The College had its last full-scale site visit in 2000. Accreditation was reaffirmed. The Commission requested a Focused Interim Report to address General Recommendations in spring 2002. That Focused Interim Report was submitted, and the Commission accepted it in June 2003. The Regular Interim Report was submitted to the Northwest Commission in October 2005; accreditation was reaffirmed January 31, 2006. The Commission requested a Focused Interim Report to be submitted in April 2007 covering the General Recommendations cited in the April 2002 Focused Interim Report. A site visit was conducted April 23, 2007.

The evaluator found the College very well prepared for the site visit. The institution had numerous documents on its web page as well as other supporting we planning documents available, including the 2002-2005 Strategic Planning Reports that provided statistical data on enrollment, programs, faculty, budget, assessment and planning. The format of the various data provided the reader with not only summaries but also end results and how the information was used for planning and assessments. All of the faculty, staff, students, and administrators were helpful and open with their responses.

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Description of Focused Interim Report and Visit

South Puget Sound Community College hosted the focused interim visit April 23, 2007. The institution provided a thorough and succinct Focused Interim Report that specified the progress made toward the General Recommendations and the changes that occurred regarding them since the full scale evaluation in 2000. SPSCC was well prepared for the visit. The institution provided excellent interview and work areas, a laptop computer with internet access, and resource materials on campus as well as on-line. The college pre-arranged interviews and also sent additional materials that were requested prior to the visit.

The evaluator reviewed the College's responses to the four General Recommendations cited in the 2002 report. South Puget Sound Community College provided substantial documentation regarding its activities in all areas. The materials included summaries of recent surveys, reports to the Board of Trustees, Strategic Plan Assessment Reports related to the college's mission and goals, and numerous other relevant reports, minutes of accreditation subcommittee meetings, and assessment activities. Course syllabi, minutes from various groups, program assessments, and various reports were available on-line. The evaluator interviewed students, faculty, and administrators. Two Board of Trustee members and one Foundation member attended the exit meeting.

Individuals Who Participated

The evaluator met with at least 30 individuals during the April 23 site visit. In most instances, group interviews were held because of time constraints. Those who participated in this process included the following:

Gerald Pumphrey, President	David Hyde
Mike Beehler	Eunice Rob
Rhonda Coats	Linda Medcalf
Patricia Hutcherson	Kathleen Harringan
Nancy McKinney	Gerard Dolmans
Kellie Braseth	Claude Dotson
Tom Witt	Dorma Bullpit
Russell Rose	
Kathy Lundeen	Student Leaders
Darby Kaikkoen	Olivia Hart
Carlea McAvory	Carlos Gerora
Jenni Spencer	
Jane Stone	Foundation Board
Joan Martin	Holly Mason
Susan Jones	
Tony Simone	Board of Trustees
Erica Dixon	Dick Wadley
Jean Logan	Barbara Clarkson

Findings

The general recommendations in the 2002 Focused Interim Report were addressed by South Puget Sound Community College subcommittees by researching data specific to each general recommendation, identifying the findings of their investigations, analyzing the findings, and making recommendations.

General Recommendation #1:

South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC) should complete the evaluation process set forth by the Assessment Committee in all College programs and use the results of the assessment activities to improve teaching and learning (Standard 2.B – Educational Program Planning and Assessment; Standard Indicator 2.B.3).

The institution did the planning for a six step evaluation process to improve teaching and learning. The full-scale evaluation in 2000 cited a need to improve the evaluation process; the institution worked to refine their assessment procedures. However, in the college's 2002 Focused Interim Report and again in the 2005 Regular Interim Report, assessment was being done but wasn't being used effectively to improve teaching and learning. The 2007 Focused Interim Report states that the evaluation process wasn't being implemented as planned. Several elements were lacking: a lack of common assessment knowledge among the faculty; a lack of understanding of how assessment is linked to programs/divisions and college goals; and a lack of links of assessment to not only program improvement but also budgetary plans have hampered closing the assessment loop. Some faculty serving on the Assessment and Research Committee as well as faculty in general questioned the value of the Assessment and Research Committee functions. Yet the Assessment and Research Committee served as the central collection point of numerous assessment and research activities. The committee's annual summaries detail substantial work.

There seems to be an uncertainty and a lack of consistent practices among the instructional divisions regarding learning outcomes and program improvement. One area lacking is a set of common educational definitions for the campus that are used consistently by everyone. Assessment workshops have been held; however, the degree of understanding among faculty varies. While some programs have made strides integrating program-level learning outcome improvements, further integration by all programs is needed. Funding for assessment changes is another issue; although there is money in the budget for assessment and assessment workshops, faculty indicated that there is no mechanism to fund assessment and program improvement.

Some of the activities that occurred to improve program planning and assessment include an entrance test that assists counselors and advisors in getting students enrolled in the appropriate level classes. The campus began using ACCUPLACER eight years ago. Faculty worked diligently to get the right cut scores. As a result, changes were made for math and reading cut scores. There is also an exit examination for graduating students;

students are required to take the test, but there is no assurance students will do their best on it since they are graduating. There was one comment from a faculty person who said that the post-test wasn't an appropriate test for a comparison with the pre-test. The institution will continue to work on ways to get a better exit measure of student learning.

The program assessment evaluation is a form of program review overseen by the Instruction Council that has wide college representation. The group meets monthly to review curricular changes. Student feedback on performance is used. However, the process doesn't seem to lead to completion of the assessment loop and program improvement. Perhaps part of the assessment process might be limited resources for quantifiable data collection; the newly hired research person will help fill this gap. The researcher's office is now the central depository for data collection.

The Strategic Plan Report included data regarding the transfer students to four year institutions or universities. It's the generic data that groups individuals together because of privacy regulations. The data do provide an overview of student success. Data from graduates from the technical or occupational fields are also gathered. The institutional researcher will provide consistent data collection and analyses. During the interview, some faculty indicated that they would like to try contacting graduates directly for feedback regarding their experiences at SPSCC.

Although a substantial amount of data were collected and used for various campus reports, the data were not used sufficiently well for identifiable program improvement. It is important that SPSCC continue to review and sharpen its efforts toward creating an integrated and meaningful program assessment process. The eight recommendations made by the SPSCC subcommittee are both doable and realistic. The evaluator encourages the college to consider them in the long range plan to meet Standard Two criteria.

General Recommendation # 2:

SPSCC should continue to improve educational program assessment processes and use the information obtained in ongoing planning. The institution should clearly define and integrate its evaluation and planning process into all College programs (Standard 2B – Educational Program Planning and Assessment; Policy 2.2 Educational Program Assessment).

The SPSCC subcommittee pursued this area by identifying six questions related to assessment procedures and planning. To answer those questions the subcommittee surveyed faculty. Some of the survey results show that faculty members feel a need for training to cover the basics as well as provide a basic plan for faculty to follow that will help them link assessment results to program improvement. This in part may be due to faculty members having a varied understanding of what constitutes student learning outcomes and program or departmental outcomes or objectives. There was also a faculty concern for funds for assessment and a concern about the increased workload.

Another finding of the survey related to the effectiveness of the Assessment and Research Committee. When faculty was interviewed, there were mixed responses. Some felt that faculty were pushed for assessment information when it was needed; however not much action followed their submissions. Another felt that they were wasting time by “listening to reports.” No consistent or standardized data collection measures were identified; some divisions used statistical measures while others didn’t. There was the comment also that the Board of Trustees stopped hearing these reports because of a lack of analysis and meaning. The issue of having support to do assessment as well as having access to a budget for assessment was mentioned.

In the college’s recommendations three areas were cited for improvement: Commonality in Assessment Methodology, Technical Support, and Institutional Support. Including the subcommittee’s recommendations in the planning process will help substantially in meeting the needs of Standard 2B, Educational Program Planning and Assessment, and Policy 2.2 Educational Assessment. Faculty and administration are working diligently to improve. Because of their work for the 2007 Focused Interim Report, they now have a clearer understanding of what needs to be done.

Many faculty members have demonstrated a commitment to embracing learning outcomes, institutional assessment activities, and the subsequent analyses, which leads to improvement in teaching performance and student achievement. One example is linked to helping students maintain acceptable academic standards. When a student’s grade point average drops below 1.75, the drop triggers an early warning alert. Early interventions are used to catch the student before the individual “hits a wall.” The one draw back is that the professor may not see the student but once. Support courses and counseling, advisement are readily available.

Student services use a survey to gather data on dropouts/non-completers attempting to determine the reasons. Most of the time they listed personal reasons—money or family issues are two primary reasons. It is easier to look at student success when the students have to take a licensure exam. The program people and the college track these kinds of results. While some data are gathered on students’ beginning salaries, the professors would like to gather information on the graduates through an on-line survey. Faculty expressed hope that the new institutional research person may provide guidance in this area.

In discussion with the college’s new president, it is apparent that the integration of assessment and program improvement is a priority that will be fully incorporated into the college’s evaluation and planning as soon as possible. Even though he has been on campus just a few months, he already has started the dialog for change.

General Recommendation #3:

SPSCC should complete the process of reviewing responsibilities of faculty with administrative assignments to assure adequate time for academic planning, curriculum development, advising, assessment activities and institutional governance (Standard 4.A

–Faculty Selection, Evaluation, Roles, Welfare, and Development; and Standard Indicator 4.A.3).

As the Regular Interim Report indicated, the campus has been working on the refinement of its instructional units' organization since the 2002 full-scale accreditation visit. The institution went about the change by establishing a task force; the college went from having faculty serve part time as faculty and part time as administrators to having full-time deans who were to assume the administrative responsibilities in 2002. In 2003 a survey was used to see how faculty felt the new structure was functioning. The survey indicated faculty didn't see much change. Subsequent surveys showed improvement; however, some faculty still had quite a few administrative duties to perform.

The current contract for faculty shows a 35 hour work week. The results of an earlier survey indicated that faculty consistently worked far more hours. When another survey was taken this year, it didn't appear that much had changed. It showed that not all deans have a clear understanding of what their responsibilities were. It's an issue that will be addressed as the institution moves forward with the new president, and when negotiations begin shortly.

Faculty Annual Work Plans are now developed in conjunction with the division dean. Non-teaching duties are identified. Because some programs require more involvement by the faculty, the institution has tried to provide release time or additional compensation for these individuals. In interviewing faculty, those with technical or occupational programs that require more attention didn't seem to object. Having to meet these administrative duties was just accepted. The small programs may have just one person doing all of the additional work. One point made, however, is that it would be nice for the institution to recognize the additional work involved. Some faculty members feel that this inequity in workloads has led to low faculty morale. When faculty members were asked directly about the morale issue, they felt that morale has improved over the past few months. This may, in part, be attributed to the change of leadership.

Because low morale appeared several times in the college's report, faculty was asked what other areas might attribute to the issue. One area that several mentioned was the different categories for compensation—lecture versus lab hours was one. Student contact hours were also mentioned. One person felt that not all professors were aware of the workload of others. When asked directly how serious the morale issue was, one person said it wasn't as bad as it seemed. Those with the loudest voices complain the most. Another individual stated that the faculty moral issue centered around three areas: (1) faculty who take on lead functions without compensation or title (such as take on adjunct faculty, or go beyond teaching such as theater); (2) inconsistency in classroom time - clinical, lab, and lab class (hard for faculty to tell the difference); and (3) prep time for certain fields - some content in technical fields change fast and thus professors have more responsibility to stay current. Another point is related to compensation and the salary for full-time faculty, part-time adjunct, and those who teach three classes but are paid as part-time. However, moral has improved because of more transparency; with new leadership came an open door policy and a willingness to listen.

When asked about professional staff development activities and the ease with which professors could attend conferences, take sabbaticals, or participate in workshops, the response was that there are several avenues available, including small amounts from grants such as Perkins or Tech Prep. Having funds available for staff development didn't seem to be an issue.

A considerable amount of work has been done on the issues that brought forth General Recommendation Three. There are a few areas that continue to need refinement. With the new contract negotiations starting, and the new college leadership, the remaining workload issues should be resolved, allowing professors adequate time to meet their other commitments.

General Recommendation #4:

SPSCC should clarify and fully implement a more complete part-time faculty evaluation system, using multiple indices (Standard Four – Faculty; Standard Indicator 4.A.5; and Policy 4.1 Faculty Evaluation).

Several changes were made between the time this recommendation was made in 2000 and the time the subcommittee interviewed the eight instructional Division Deans. Additionally, the 2005-2007 Negotiated Faculty Agreement addressed the role of part-time faculty. As a result, evaluation of part-time or adjunct professors is standardized and administered quite consistently across campus. They are evaluated using multiple indices and on a regular schedule. One person said that the multiple indices were there all along, it was just the timing with different peer and administrative reviews.

Most adjunct professors work full time and aren't free to participate in campus activities although they are welcome to attend meetings and negotiations. They are also able to apply for staff development funds. Although part-time faculty have a three step salary scale, one part-timer said that there should be something for those who have attained the third step and have continued to teach year after year without any additional financial recognition. The individual acknowledged, however, that the amounts were controlled by the State Legislature.

Part-time faculty orientation is one area that could be improved according to faculty. Currently, there isn't any sort of collective meeting of all part-time people at the beginning of the year or quarter. Instead, they are given a comprehensive Adjunct Faculty Handbook. The document is excellent; however, full-time and part-time faculty indicated that they would like something in addition to the Handbook on a quarterly basis. Currently, some orientation is done within divisions, but this isn't done consistently across campus.

It appears that the institution has pretty well resolved the issues that lead to General Recommendation Four.

Summary

In conclusion, the evaluator found a campus in transition. Many areas of the campus are under scrutiny. Excellent documents exist such as the Master Plan, Facilities Master Plan, and a budgeting process for equipment. Other documents are quite new and excellent, such as the Faculty Handbook and the Adjunct Handbook. Educational focus groups are meeting to explore program opportunities. The campus has an open, honest environment as evidenced by a very candid, thoroughly researched Focused Interim Report. Having a researcher experienced in educational research on board will provide the leadership and support needed for faculty and administration to “close the loop” and provide improved assessment activities and improved teaching and learning. The institution has a very dedicated, hardworking faculty that is looking forward to the changes occurring through the new president’s leadership. SPSCC has made progress in complying with all four General Recommendations. The college’s recommendations provided in its 2007 Focused Interim Report for each of the four General Recommendations will provide for continuous review and improvement in all four areas.

Commendations:

1. SPSCC is to be commended for the in depth research, including numerous surveys and studies, in preparing its candid Focused Interim Report.
2. SPSCC is to be commended for its planning processes and thorough documentation of institutional policies and assessment activities. In particular, annual reports, and minutes of major committee meetings, as well as documented and thorough College and Adjunct Faculty Handbooks are exceptional.
3. Faculty, staff, and administration are to be commended for their openness, and cooperative working spirit that builds congeniality, and a positive learning environment for students.

