

# **Year One Peer-Evaluation Report**

**Lower Columbia Community College  
Longview, Washington  
September 15 – November 4, 2011**

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

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# Evaluation Committee

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## **Introduction**

Lower Columbia College (LCC), located in Longview, Washington, was established in 1934 and received its first accreditation from NWCCU in 1948. In 1967, LCC joined the community college system of Washington, governed by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. The College primarily serves Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties, a service district with a population over 100,000. Enrollment data provided in the 2011 Year One Report indicates LCC enrolls approximately 5,000 in credit and non-credit courses per quarter.

From September 15 to November 4, 2011, a three-person peer-evaluation team from the Commission conducted a Year One Peer Evaluation of LCC in an off-site telephonic and virtual environment. The structure of the evaluation consisted of a teleconferenced organizational meeting and teleconferenced 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.

LCC underwent its last decennial full-scale comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2010, during which LCC's accreditation was reaffirmed and the College received six recommendations. While the Commission indicated in a letter dated January 31, 2011 that LCC was substantially in compliance, it required that recommendations 1, 2, and 3 be addressed with an addendum to the 2011 Year One Report; LCC addressed these recommendations within the context of the Year One Report, under the report's preface, and are discussed below for the purposes of this evaluation.

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

The Evaluation Committee received electronic and hard copies of the College's Year One Self-Evaluation Report, as well as the College's Catalog and a well-appropriated appendix. The Year One Self-Evaluation Report was properly structured and was thorough, yet concise, in articulating the College's efforts to understand, apply, and evaluate itself in juxtaposition to the requirements specified in Standard 1 – Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations. The Report made it easy for the Year-One Evaluation Team to navigate the materials provided and ascertain the methods through which LCC has developed its mission statement and developed core themes that represent the values of the institution and how it will measure its success in achieving its purpose and goals.

## **Report on Recommendation 1**

Lower Columbia College hosted a full-scale evaluation visit in October 2010, resulting in six recommendations, the first three for which NWCCU requested an addendum be included with the Year One Report, Fall 2011.

Recommendation 1 from the 2010 Peer-Evaluation is as follows:

The Committee recommends the College review resources to adequately provide student financial assistance. The current physical location of the Financial Aid Office is in an open and unsecure area. This arrangement appears to be inadequate in addressing the needs of the office to provide a secure, confidential atmosphere for discussing financial aid matters. With the increase in student demand for financial aid services, the College has not yet increased the staffing to accommodate the additional demands. (Standards 3.A.4, 3.B.6)

Based on the update provided by LCC in its Year One Report, it appears that the College responded immediately to this recommendation by exploring options for remodeling the Financial Aid area. A primary criterion for the remodel was “developing options for making the space more appropriate for confidential discussions.” Local funding was secured to provide an architect and fund the remodeling project, which is scheduled to be completed March 2012.

LCC continues to experience enrollment at 140% of its state-funded allocation projections, making it difficult to fund new positions. Nonetheless, LCC has identified a local means for funding an additional full-time financial aid staff position to help alleviate the pressure on that function in meeting student needs. Additionally, an electronic portal has been established on the College website to help facilitate more student-friendly financial aid application, award, and status functions. A review of the website reveals an easy-to-navigate system that appears to streamline student access to financial aid resources.

Compliment:

1. The Evaluation Panel compliments Lower Columbia College for its quick response to Recommendation 1 and for creatively identifying funding to appropriately respond to meeting student access and privacy needs.

## **Report on Recommendation 2**

Recommendation 2 from the 2010 Peer-Evaluation is as follows:

The Committee recommends the College evaluate the effectiveness of the faculty advising program. While the College has an active faculty advising program, the

student advising workload of each teaching faculty member, as well as the student advising preparation of each faculty member, appear inconsistent. (Standards 2.A.5, 2.C.5, 4.A.2)

LCC has taken steps to ease the advising load of faculty by identifying adjunct faculty interested in advising students within certain high demand disciplines and programs, but it remains unclear whether this has addressed the workload issue across the board, as needed, in all disciplines. A taskforce has been appointed to develop “a plan to improve communication between the faculty advisors and the education planners, provide additional training for faculty advisors, and to review the processes associated with the advising system,” although it appears this effort is still in the development phase.

While these efforts represent steps in the right direction for addressing Recommendation 2, the Year One Evaluation Panel is unable to conclude that sufficient progress is being gained in actual effectiveness of the advising program. For example, there is little evidence in the Report that full-time faculty are properly prepared or trained for student advising, nor that consistency of the advising load is being addressed.

Concern:

1. The Evaluation Panel urges the College to ensure that it is applying changes to all faculty and within all disciplines consistently, and that preparation and training for advising be consistently applied.

## **Report on Recommendation 3**

Recommendation 3 from the 2010 Peer-Evaluation is as follows:

The Committee recommends the College implement regular and systematic evaluation of all faculty on a continuing basis. Lower Columbia College has policies and procedures in place for both tenured and pre-tenured faculty, and the evaluation of pre-tenured faculty appears to be consistent and constructive. The evaluation for tenured faculty and part-time faculty appears to be heavily reliant on student course evaluations. (Policy 4.1 and Standard 4.A.5)

LCC has made progress toward implementing an evaluation process that promises to be regular, consistent, and constructive. Sample evaluation documents were provided in Appendix E as evidence that there is a faculty review process that includes peer observations, professional activities, and self analysis in addition to student evaluations, but most of these documents appear to be those used for pre-tenure and part-time faculty; one form (“Full-time Faculty Evaluation Checklist”) appeared applicable to all full-time faculty, including those who are

tenured. A copy of the LCC Faculty Contract was also provided, but only appears to address the student evaluation process. The Panel was unable to verify the Year One Report in terms of progress toward addressing this recommendation. It should be noted, however, that the report states that changes would be implemented at the beginning of the 2011-12 academic year. Further, language regarding strengthening the evaluation process regarding full-time tenured faculty is all in future tense, indicating that the College is aware of the need to, and in the process of improving, its evaluation process.

Concern:

1. While LCC appears to have embraced the need to improve the faculty evaluation process, especially as it applies to full-time tenured faculty and to relying on more than student evaluations, plans adopted since the 2010 Evaluation need to be fully implemented. The Evaluation Team urges the College to continue its efforts in addressing Recommendation 3.

## **Report on Eligibility Requirements**

### **Eligibility Requirement Two – Authority**

Lower Columbia College is one of 34 institutions under the governance of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. LCC derives its statutory authority to operate as specified in RCW 28B.50 - *The Community and Technical College Act of 1991*.

### **Eligibility Requirement Three – Mission and Core Themes**

According to the information provided in the report, LCC worked “from the mission statement and existing College Outcomes” (p. 1) to develop the core themes, objectives, and indicators, and these were approved by the LCC Board of Trustees during the 2011 summer retreat. The core themes, objectives, and indicators are directly tied to and supportive of the college mission statement while remaining consistent the State of Washington’s guidelines for performance indicators.

## **Section One**

### **Introduction:**

The College’s Mission Statement, as provided in the Year One Self-Evaluation Report, as well as in the *Course Catalog*, is as follows:

The mission of Lower Columbia College is to ensure each learner's personal and professional success, and influence lives in ways that are local, global, traditional and innovative.

Our vision is to be a powerful force for improving the quality of life in our community.

Our campus community expects an environment of integrity, respect, collaboration, cooperation, inclusion, and innovation that fosters personal growth, academic excellence, and accountability.

The College's Core Themes are derived from the Mission, the Board's Ends Statements, and the Academic Master Plan and are as follows:

- Workforce and Economic Development
- Transfer and Academic Preparation
- Student Access and Support
- Institutional Excellence

The mission statement was revised in 2007 through a process led by the LCC President with oversight from the Executive Planning Council. The institution takes pride in that the mission statement "clearly communicates that student success is at the core of what we do" (p. 7). The core themes were established through a process that included multiple avenues through which members of the campus community could participate in their development. This approach is consistent with those resulting in a broad understanding of the mission statement and its core themes.

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

The College's Mission and Ends Statements appear to be widely disseminated to its internal and external communities through the college catalog, the LCC web site and other major college publications. Additionally, colorful posters with the mission statement and outcomes appear throughout the campus, and brochures with the mission statement and other components are made available at several locations throughout the college.

The mission statement has been made accessible through a planning document that clearly links common questions to the LCC mission statement and goals. These questions were presented in the 2010 Self-Study as follows:

- WHO are we? WHY are we here?
- WHAT are we trying to achieve?
- HOW are we going to achieve it?



- WHEN do we do things to ensure we stay on course?
- WHERE is all of this going to happen?

These simple questions established a clear, usable path toward development of core themes, outcomes, and ultimately indicators.

Fulfillment of the mission statement is measured through the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) established in 1999. Data from the KPIs is tracked and analyzed each year, with actions plans created based on the results. The results are compiled into a Monitoring Report that are reviewed by the LCC Board of Trustees annually. This system is the framework for mission fulfillment, and has been for several years. While the system has worked well for the institution, LCC recognizes “that our framework is in need of updating” and that the new accreditation standards have provided an “opportunity to thoroughly evaluate and strengthen our existing system” (p. 8). The approach LCC appears to be taking to the core themes, the institution believes, will help it further improve a system for continuous improvement.

Compliment:

Lower Columbia College has a clearly mapped linkage between the mission statement, the core themes, and the Key Performance Indicators, as well as awareness of a need to improve this framework of measuring mission fulfillment. The Evaluation Team compliments LCC not only for embracing continuous improvement, but for identifying a means for reviewing and revising the established means for measuring mission fulfillment.

### **Report on Standard 1.B: Core Themes**

As indicated above, Lower Columbia College has identified the following four Core Themes:

- Workforce and Economic Development
- Transfer and Academic Preparation
- Student Access and Support
- Institutional Excellence

The Core Themes were developed with campus-wide input and are tied to the LCC mission statement. The College has identified objectives with associated outcomes and indicators. The indicators utilize the existing KPIs, but the institution has developed a clear mapping between “core indicators” and the KPIs. The institution has identified benchmarks for success where the KPIs are the basis for the indicator, but new indicators have yet to see identified benchmarks.

## **Summary**

Lower Columbia College's Year One Self-Evaluation Report guided the Evaluation Committee through the College's mission statement, its development, and a plan for measuring its fulfillment. The core themes are clearly articulated with well-mapped existing Key Performance Indicators and newly developing core theme indicators. These, as articulated in the Report, enabled the evaluation team to gain insight into and make an objective evaluation of LCC's intentions with respect to Eligibility Requirements 2 and 3 and Standard One, of the 2010 Standards.

The College has established an appropriate mission statement for a comprehensive community college. The mission statement provides a basis for establishing the identity and focus of the College. The College has established four core themes that support the mission. The themes have objectives, indicators of achievement, and tools for assessment. The Evaluation Team found that further development is needed for the newly identified indicators in order to establish measurable indicators for assessing the degree to which each core theme objective is accomplished.

## **Commendations and Recommendations**

### **Commendations:**

1. The Evaluation Team commends Lower Columbia College for having clearly established measures for mission fulfillment, linking newly developed core themes with objectives and outcomes that are well-mapped to indicators.

### **Recommendations:**

1. LCC has established indicators with clear benchmarks of achievement for most core themes; however, the Evaluation Team recommends that the College provide indicators that are measurable for each of the newly developed indicators not linked to Key Performance Indicators. (Standard 1B.2)