

*Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities*

A Full-Scale

Evaluation Committee Report

**Lower Columbia College**

Longview, Washington

October 18-20, 2010

A Confidential Report Prepared for the  
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities  
That Represents the Views of the Evaluation Committee

# Evaluation Committee Report

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## Evaluation Committee Roster

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## **Introduction**

Lower Columbia College, in Longview, Washington, was founded in 1934 and serves approximately 5,000 students each quarter. Longview is located along the Columbia River, with beautiful forests and Mt. St. Helens nearby. The college is situated one hour from the Pacific Ocean.

As part of the Washington Community and Technical College system, LCC offers a transfer degree program, professional-technical training in credit and non-credit continuing-education, and basic skills education for adult learners. The economic downturn and high community unemployment have resulted in a growth rate 151% above state-funded targets. Without additional state support, this institution has increased course offerings and class sizes, with the goal of serving all enrolled students.

In spite of budget reductions, the institution has effectively initiated an outcomes-based process to set direction for the College, measure goals, and enhance instruction. A Title III Strengthening Institutions Technology grant has allowed the College to use new technologies to enhance instruction and improve services. Over eighty percent of the faculty have trained in the use of on-line course delivery.

Strong partnerships have resulted from innovative programs such as I-BEST (Integrative Basic Education Skills and Training), Fast Track GED and AA Transfer Express programs, I-TRANS, the LPN2RN eLearning program, and the Rural Outreach Nursing Education program. The Evaluation Committee identified multiple examples of strong community and public school partnerships. Lower Columbia College serves as an organizational leader in responding to the needs of local business and industry, and continuing to improve the economic future of the community.

## **Self-Study**

To prepare for the self-study process, a team of Lower Columbia College employees attended training in the spring of 2008. The College named a Self-Study Executive Committee and Co-Chairs for each of the nine standards. The Self-Study Steering Committee was composed of the Executive Committee and the Co-Chairs of each of the standard committees.

Each committee, led by faculty and staff with content knowledge and institutional history, met early in the fall of 2008 to review and assign duties related to their standards. In some cases, the committees organized subcommittees to work on specific sections. Committee Chairpersons invited members to read the standard and provide feedback on the standard and the process.

During the self-study process, the College experienced significant budget reductions. Most employees were faced with increasing workloads. This made it difficult for some members of the College to participate in the process, although everyone was invited to participate in the process. Updates were communicated in campus e-mail and monthly presentations at the LCC Board of

Trustees meeting throughout the two year process. Understanding that all employees were not actively engaged in the self-study process, opportunity for engagement was evident.

The strengths of the institution, as stated in the Executive Summary of the Institutional Self-Study are a positive campus culture and “can-do” attitude, a dedicated governing Board of Trustees, effective utilization of a Title III Strengthening Institutions Technology grant, and creative instructional offerings and support services. These strengths were highlighted in many of the on-campus interviews conducted by members of the Evaluation Committee.

The Self-Study provided strong evidence of community support and collaboration. It also addressed all of the Challenges identified in the previous Self-Study. The institution identified many of those areas as current strengths. Additionally, complete information and tables were submitted as part of the appendices and the exhibits.

Institutional challenges highlight budget reductions, staffing reductions, and increasing enrollment numbers, as well as a continuous effort to meet the needs of a more diverse population. The Self-Study document was a result of an honest institutional self-appraisal, identifying both strengths and challenges. The College has addressed every challenge that it identified, and the Committee found evidence of problem solving initiatives to address the challenges and strive for institutional improvement.

Overall, the Committee was pleased with the information that was included in the Institutional Self-Study and the support documents. Documents were received in a timely manner and exhibits were complete and accurately arranged in the work room. The Committee also had the opportunity to interview members of the community regarding the extent to which the planning process had become embedded in the institutional structure.

Recommendations that had been made in the 2000 Comprehensive Evaluation were addressed in the Institutional Self-Study and in the on campus interviews. The College recently completed its eleventh cycle of monitoring progress toward achieving each of its College Outcomes. Each Monitoring Report (one per College Outcome) is reviewed by a team of faculty and staff, reviewed by the President, and presented to the Board of Trustees on a monthly basis during the academic year. The LCC framework has been replicated by several other colleges in the state of Washington. College assessment is based on a four-part model that involves faculty and staff from every program and discipline.

As a result of the 2000 Comprehensive Evaluation, the College updated procedures for filing student grievances. Policy information is available in multiple college publications, on the college website, and referenced in the Catalog. During student interviews, it was evident to members of the Evaluation Committee that students understand the policy, know where to find accurate information, and believe the policy ensures a fair hearing. While modifications to the current policy may be addressed in the future, students and parents can easily find the information.

The College has a Faculty Evaluation Policy, which was developed in response to a recommendation received from the 2000 Comprehensive Evaluation. Student evaluations are used by faculty

members to improve teaching effectiveness. While some faculty members meet to discuss the student evaluations with the respective deans, evaluation by faculty peers and academic supervisors appeared inconsistent at the time of the Committee Evaluation visit. The Evaluation Committee found the documentation for evaluation difficult to verify. In other words, what may happen in conversation was not available in an employee file or perhaps any type of permanent file. Professional conversations occur between department colleagues and between supervisors and faculty, but substantiation was inconsistent.

Responding to a recommendation to address current and long range needs of the institution, Lower Columbia College has implemented a master planning process. The process incorporates data from a variety of sources including community members. The most recent master planning review was conducted in 2008, with previous plans produced in 2003 and 2005. The next update is scheduled for 2011.

The current budgeting process is clearly defined and tied to the strategic plan. All budget requests must be tied directly to the College's Strategic Issues. The College budget development and forecast model is dependent upon the Washington State Board for Community and Technical College's biennial revenue and allocation cycle. The budget process is transparent and the three year forecast is in place, although the institution recognizes that the economic condition of the community and the state also impacts the College.

The Evaluation Committee found that Lower Columbia College administration has made noble attempts to communicate the short and long range planning process with members of the college community. Information is available for review in multiple formats. While most college employees are very aware of the sources to find this information, some employees expressed concern about their confusion regarding their role and their authority in the process.

## **Eligibility Requirements**

The College Self-Study, support documents, and on-campus interviews support the fact that the College continues to meet each of the eligibility requirements for accreditation, as established by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

## **STANDARD ONE -Institutional Mission and Goals, Planning and Effectiveness**

### **Mission and Goals**

The Lower Columbia College Mission defines the institution, including its educational activities, its student body, and its role in the higher education community. The College is in its second decade of policy governance, a system based on rigorous assessment of the mission and goals. Regular evaluation of the progress supports corrective action when needed.

**“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.”** This statement was derived from the community. It is widely recognized and understood.

In alignment with the Washington State Community College Act of 1967, the Lower Columbia College vision, mission, and values statements define the College. In 1999 the College developed a new strategic plan. Seven College Outcomes include Access, Transfer, Professional/Technical, Basic Skills/Pre-College Education, Customized Education, Community Enrichment, and Institutional Excellence. In an effort to monitor progress, a list of Key Performance Indicators defines each outcome.

In 2005 the President convened the Executive Planning Council to reexamine the College Plan. All Campus constituencies, including faculty, classified staff, exempt staff, administration, and the Board of Trustees were represented on the Council. The President served as the Chair of the Council. Throughout the next academic year, the Council reviewed different aspects of the College planning structure. It opted to perform a SWOT analysis and to extend the work into the following academic year in order to complement a statewide environmental scanning project that was in process at the time.

Findings were disseminated to the campus community for review and comment. As a result, the Council produced a new mission/vision/values statement, revised Strategic Issues, and added additional Key Performance Indicators. The College Outcomes did not change, but the new Strategic Plan was presented to the Board of Trustees and adopted in July 2007.

During the 2005-2007 reexamination process, it was determined that in order to move the College closer to meeting its goals, two new strategic issues were developed. The new strategic issues – **“developing a culture of evidence, and ensuring an adequate physical and technological infrastructure to meet the needs of our learners”**—were added as College strategic issues.

The Strategic Issues provide the framework for the development of the Annual Priorities, which in turn drives the College’s annual operational planning cycle. The three main divisions of the College, Instruction, Student Services, and Administration – develop their annual goals in support of the College’s Strategic Issues. Currently, the Annual Priorities represent the highest priorities for the institution’s academic year. Due to the volatile enrollment, a seventh Strategic Issue was incorporated.

## **Planning and Effectiveness**

All instructional and non instructional units are required to conduct program assessment on a two year cycle. The same five step process that is used throughout the institution is used to review and set goals, collect data, analyze the data, develop action plans, and implement changes.

Each of the three vice presidents of the College uses the Annual Priorities to develop an annual plan for her area. Unit directors/deans identify additional goals and implement strategies for success.

Throughout the year individual units report their progress in the monthly Operations Council reports. Vice Presidents receive a report from each dean/director on how the priorities were accomplished. The vice presidents in turn report to the president, who prepares the Annual Report of Accomplishments for the Board of Trustees. Communication opportunities are available from the top down and the bottom up. The Vice Presidents and the President invite communication from the college community, with an understanding that respect will be given for the chain of command.

The LCC planning, assessment, and budgeting process work in tandem to drive annual priorities. While oversight is provided by the President's Cabinet, Monitoring Report Teams are composed of college employees from all area of the College. The Executive Planning Council, which includes the president, three vice presidents, and leadership from the classified and faculty unions provides advice and oversight to the process.

Specific use of the results of extensive evaluation include the expansion of the LCC Nursing Program and the development of eLearning through the LPN2RN program to serve working LPNs needing to complete registered nursing education.

The Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment consists of a Director. The office is also funded for a half-time Program Assistant position, but this position, like several other positions, due to budget, was vacant at the time of this comprehensive evaluation. It is the responsibility of this department to facilitate the annual evaluation of the College Outcomes and Key Performance Indicators throughout the Monitoring Report Process. The college budget is tied directly to the strategic planning process and assessment results.

The Director also chairs the College Assessment Committee. While it is ultimately the responsibility of faculty and staff across all areas of the College to conduct the analysis, develop action plans, and implement changes, it was evident that the strong leadership from the Director of Institutional Research has institutionalized the assessment and planning process. Employees recognize the respect the President and Vice President have for the analysis, and the Board of Trustees only approve plans that are based on the College assessment data.

Institutional research is integrated with and supportive of institutional evaluation and planning. The College allocates financial resources to support the Summer Assessment Institute and other instructional processes. A minimum of one instructional calendar day per academic year is dedicated to assessment activities. Faculty also use an instrument called "**How Did We Do?**" to answer survey questions about specific services from the Research Office. Interviews provided substantiation that the culture of the College incorporates planning and assessment. There is a high regard for the Office of Institutional Research and the College Assessment Committee. Although some employees did not participate in the planning process, they acknowledged the opportunity to participate, and that the opportunity was actively marketed in multiple venues.

Members of the Longview community are familiar with the mission, goals, and planning activities at the College. The College distributes an Annual Report to the Community, which highlights data supporting progress on operational goals, Strategic Planning, and Student Outcomes Assessment. Community members are also invited to respond through a brief survey. Monitoring Reports are



presented to the Board of Trustees, which are open and attended by members of the community and the press.

Additionally, the College President serves on a variety of community boards, including the Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Council. He presents information about the College to local service clubs, and he acts as the College spokesperson with the media. The communication with the Board of Trustees is both open and informative. Members of the Board communicate directly with the President and with members of their communities, but they also invite participation at Board Meetings from different college employees. Board members acknowledged in an interview with members of the Evaluation Committee that they only conduct business as “a whole.” Individual Board members understand their responsibilities and the responsibilities that they give their College President. Lower Columbia College has strong support from their Board of Trustees, community organizations, and individuals in their communities.

The College has effectively provided coherent communication regarding institution-wide strategic planning. The institution’s attempts at planning and effectiveness have supported recent budget reductions, and will continue to support difficult economic decisions that may need to be made during this current academic year. A college cannot make draconian budget cuts without alienating some students, faculty, or members of the community, but presently, there is support for the transparent, yet difficult decisions that have been made and will need to be made by the college administration, the President, and the Board of Trustees.

## **STANDARD TWO – Educational Program and Its Effectiveness**

Lower Columbia College is a comprehensive two-year college serving the people of southwestern Washington in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties and the northwestern parts of Oregon. The College offers five two-year associate degrees, both for transfer and stand-alone, and multiple certificates, including self-designed certificates that help community members in retraining or other specific goals. Articulation agreements with Washington schools are in place and students transferring to those schools move smoothly into their new programs when they have completed the Lower Columbia programs. **(2.A)**

After unprecedented growth in the last two years the school is filled to capacity and beyond, but the institution continues to meet student needs. This has been accomplished by offering classes later in the day and by hiring more adjunct faculty. Space that was used for faculty meetings or student clubs has now been assigned to classes. With faculty oversight, enrollment caps have been raised on many classes. It was evident to the Evaluation Committee that employees honor their commitment to a “can-do” approach, and work individually, or as part of a team to provide the attitude, the expertise, and the time necessary to meet the needs of LCC students.

Washington fiscal policies allow for budget cuts in different areas, and Lower Columbia is now dealing with a series of budget cuts. Budgeting and the planning for new construction and maintenance come from multiple sources, and the College has recently completed construction on a

beautiful fine arts center that is being utilized and appreciated by school and community entities. Planning has been completed, and ground breaking is expected next July for a new Health and Sciences Building. The anticipated construction will allow growth for science and allied health programs, as well as the updating of frequently used, but older laboratories. The current nursing area will be repurposed into a fitness center. Funds for the fitness center have been accumulating through a self-assessed student fee schedule. Although there is discouragement with the recent proposed budget cut, Lower Columbia College remains optimistic about new plans and space. The institution continues to place maximum effort on helping students achieve their goals. Available financial resources are directed to instructional and student services facilities. (2.A.1, 2.A.9)

The faculty own the Lower Columbia College curriculum. Ideas, design, development, implementation, and planning all start with the faculty. In the midst of the economic turmoil, they have continued to work on new programs that are meeting student needs. Some of these include the on-line nursing program and the I-BEST Program. Developed and instituted by faculty they are also carefully tracking and assessing these programs to make sure students are achieving their graduation and transfer goals and watching for program improvements as well. Multiple examples of creative curriculum and partnerships were observed and discussed with the Evaluation Committee.

“Faculty play a prominent role in institutional assessment activities.” (LCC Self-Study p. 2-11). Evidence was found that assessment takes place on many levels and for the most part, it is faculty driven. Documentation demonstrates that assessment is active for general education outcomes and for individual courses. With the facilitation of the Director Institutional Research, faculty are driving the college assessment.

Faculty morale is high, and the administration is responsive to faculty suggestions to implement new courses and programs. One example is the nursing program. When faculty determined that many people wanted to become nurses, and the community need for this profession was high, they also recognized that many residents cannot move to Longview to attend classes five days a week. The faculty designed many of the prerequisite classes and other nursing classes in an on-line format. They negotiated with hospitals in locations near students so that students could complete their clinical experience in their local communities. Some members of the faculty travel to each area of the state once each quarter to work with students in an all-day Saturday lab exercise. The students also attend a six-week full-time course in the summer, necessitating minimal time away from home. The students are graduating and passing board exams with high marks, and most are being hired by local hospitals.

The math department provides another example of faculty initiative and administrative response. When math faculty determined, through their assessment process, that many pre-college level math students were requiring four quarters to get through the pre-college math classes, with a lot of repetition from quarter to quarter, the faculty developed a new program of three quarters work that will also allow students to work faster if they choose the on-line options. This program is being tested this fall quarter, and the faculty have high hopes that this initiative will save students time and money, and ensure the same high standard of teaching excellence that student expect from Lower Columbia College.

## **Business and Industry Training Services**

The Business and Industry Training Services Department is the home for a wide range of community and employer centered credit and non-credit instructional programs and classes. The Department is part of the Workforce Education Division, and its wide diversity of course offerings directly supports the community outreach mission and vision of the College. Primary programming areas include contract business and industry training, continuing education, community education and small business development classes, in collaboration with the Small Business Development Center.

The department relies almost exclusively on adjunct faculty for teaching and developing classes, but the departments consult regularly on course design and offerings with full-time faculty within the Workforce Education Division. Credit-based curriculum is developed using standardized LCC procedures.

Non-credit business and industry courses include customized training to meet specific employer training requests. Classes are designed by contract or funded by grants. Workforce education/professional development courses are targeted at a wide variety of workers, including teachers, office workers, manufacturing employees and healthcare professionals.

The department also offers a wide assortment of health related courses and programs designed to meet the life-long learning needs of area residents. The Better Bones and Balance Program has been offered at LCC for eight years, and has been very well received by community seniors.

Many of the courses offered by Business and Industry Services are provided online, utilizing proprietary providers such as Ed2Go and Gatlin Educational Services. Agreements are in place to ensure LCC maintains direct instructional control of the online programs.

Established and appropriate hiring practices and procedures are in place. Regular student evaluations occur within this department, as do classroom observations, and one-on-one discussions between the director and individual faculty members.

Faculty indicate that much of the department's equipment and technology is old and failing. The College IT department has difficulty responding to technology repair requests, due to short staffing. The program has one dedicated classroom and as a result must compete for space with traditional classes. Additional challenges are presented due to the fact that the current registration system does not allow Business and Industry Training Services access to on-line registration for students. The same issue is presented with the current college financial system. It does not fit well with the department's cost-recovery accounting needs. It is anticipated that this may change with the new student registration system.

Existing staff are extremely dedicated and enthusiastic about the department; however, given the level of classes they are producing and the substantial number of customized contracted offerings, they are short on personnel. The program is primarily cost-recovery, yet the department is unable to capitalize on some revenue generating opportunities due to staffing limitations.

Ongoing program assessment is an important value of the department with a variety of regular activities in place to ascertain program success and relevance. Specific activities include extensive classroom evaluations, customer follow-up surveys, faculty surveys and in-person interviews with partners and customers and substantial program reviews. The department is part of the ongoing, four-year formalized program review process.

The department continually uses the data secured through its program assessment activities to refine, redirect and create new programming to respond to community and customer needs. Although program outcomes are identified for all credit-based instruction, it does not appear they are widely incorporated in non-credit instruction. Given the important foundation role that program outcomes play in assessment, the department should begin to utilize program outcomes not only for assessment purposes, but to also provide potential students a better of understanding of what they can expect to learn during the class.

The department does track clock hours for educators participating in continuing education activities, however the department only rarely awards continuing education units (CEU's). All CEU and hourly tracking records are kept on file in the Continuing Education Office for seven years.

Although the Business and Industry Training Services Department has a very small staff, they are recognized by the Evaluation Committee for their continual efforts to engage a multitude of public and private community partners to create unique collaborative activities that benefit students, the communities, employers and the economic outlook. An example of the critical role the department plays in the community is illustrated by a recent letter from an area employer, whose company has been in existence for over a hundred years. The letter indicated that their company had been on the verge of going out of business, and credited the efforts of the department as a major reason for their company's survival during these difficult economic times.

## **Business and Information Technology Department**

### **Accounting, Computer Science, Business Technology and Business Administration/ Management**

The Business and Information Technology Department offers a comprehensive mix of programs including lower-division transfer, two-year degrees and a variety of certificates, all of which directly support the mission of LCC. All degrees and certificates are comprehensive in nature, have adequate courses to prepare students for transfer and/or employment and include related instructional requirements.

The faculty within the division have a strong sense of ownership and belief in their individual programs and the department as a whole. There is substantial evidence of teamwork and collegiality amongst the full-time faculty with all sharing a common vision of successful instruction and student success. There exists a strong "can do" spirit as evidenced by the last two years of substantial enrollment increases. The dominant sentiment of the faculty team is best described as "we will do

what needs to be done!” Faculty bring a strong mix of real-world work experience and academic preparation, which in turn provides students with a realistic and authentic educational experience.

Faculty indicate a need for additional classroom space, better computer labs and increased support from the IT department for lab maintenance and online learning system support. Currently there is not a system in place to deal with major online learning system outages on holidays and weekends. One faculty member reported spending close to one hundred hours of uncompensated time performing lab maintenance.

Course outlines are complete, including learner outcomes and can be found on the LCC website. The one universal exception was Associate Arts Degree with Direct Transfer Agreements (DTA). These degrees only contained “General Education Outcomes.” This is an intentional designed developed by academic faculty.

Instructors collect a variety of assessment data and compile a yearly assessment report with specific recommendations, and all programs are fully reviewed every four years as per LCC policy. Faculty utilize national and industry standards to determine program viability and relevancy. Faculty indicated they have made substantial progress in outcomes assessment in the last five years, yet they believe is need for additional work. For example several utilize the “General Education Writing Rubric,” but hope to have a process in place that will measure Technical Writing skills.

The procedures for hiring faculty are well outlined and meet approved LCC guidelines. Faculty members participate in the screening and interviewing process. There was some concern that the recently implemented procedure of only forwarding the “strength and weaknesses” of candidates to the president for final selection was impacting overall faculty involvement in the hiring process.

Increasing the number of adjuncts has helped to reduce teaching loads, however coordinating adjunct activities and the increasing non-teaching work is substantially impacting faculty members’ time. It is also recognized that there is some inconsistency in the evaluation, oversight, and participation of part-time faculty.

Given the substantial enrollment levels, teaching loads are increasing. Several faculty members indicated they taught during the summer in order to accommodate the growing number of students. Securing competent adjunct faculty is a college challenge.

The advising system does not seem to be working in an effective manner. Faculty reported substantial advising loads, over and above the thirty required by contract. One faculty member indicated having over 100 advisees, no faculty member has been assigned such a high number of advisees. This particular faculty member has developed several effective strategies for dealing with the increased numbers, including the utilization of group advising and also posting a substantial amount of advising material through the college online learning system. A few academic faculty members expressed concern over the fact that students do not contact them or respond to invitations to meet with them.

As per contract agreement, faculty are compensated for advising students above the standard thirty students.

Faculty members and the division dean indicated that the faculty evaluation system is working well within their division. There is strong support for faculty professional development, especially in state.

Faculty indicated they feel like they have a very strong voice in charting their department direction and that of the division. They indicate they receive strong support from their dean and feel positive about the division's current direction. Several indicated the college would benefit from more clarity about the level of involvement when requesting faculty participation on committees and taskforces. All indicated that despite their increasing workload and rising student enrollments they are happy to participate on additional committees and taskforces, but only if their input was going to be utilized.

Faculty feel that LCC is a good place to work and they clearly are very proud of their involvement with the college and support of the college's mission. Interviews with students indicated a high level of student satisfaction with the availability, expertise, and professionalism of the faculty.

## **Industrial Technology Department**

### **Auto, Welding, Diesel and Fire Science, Machine Shop, Pulp & Paper**

The Industrial Technology Department offers a comprehensive mix of career and technical programs including two-year degrees and a variety of certificates, all of which directly support the mission of LCC. All degrees and certificates are comprehensive in nature, have adequate courses to prepare students for employment and include required related instructional requirements.

The faculty within the division has a strong sense of ownership and belief in their individual programs. There is a high degree of camaraderie amongst the program as they face substantial enrollment challenges and a changing student population. This department demonstrated a unified and strong "can do" spirit.

Despite generally positive attitudes, some challenges exist now and must be recognized about the future. Dramatically increasing student levels have resulted in cramped shop areas, with facilities stretched to capacity. Another challenge is the increasing demand from employers regarding student knowledge and skill levels. Faculty indicated that in some cases there is just not time within the confines of a two-year degree to meet the learning requirements of some employers. Still another challenge has been the changing student populations, which can be under prepared for college level work. Students may also have difficulty understanding the work ethic and human relations skills necessary for success in today's workplace. Concern was also expressed about the impact of the large number of students and on the life-cycle of equipment and trainers.

The Auto/Diesel facility is in the far north corner of the campus and shares the building with a local high school auto shop program. As mentioned earlier, the facility is close to capacity with a large number of students at peak instruction times. The shop is very open, and being adjacent to a main thoroughfare poses some security risks. One solution may be to institute a dress code that would require students to wear some sort of uniform work shirt. The uniform is a standard procedure within

most vehicle repair environments. Requiring some form of uniform would not only reduce security risks, but would also help to reinforce students understanding of the importance of appropriate work attire. Faculty voiced strong support for the Division Dean and the managerial approach, indicating success in securing resources to support department programs.

Most course outlines are complete, but several lacked learner outcomes and/or they were not as comprehensive as expected. In further discussion it appeared that most of the program faculty in the department did not have a clear understanding of learner outcomes and the overall assessment process. Faculty currently utilize some industry standards to measure program viability and relevancy, however it does not appear that these standards are utilized as part of an integrated assessment program. Faculty indicated that limited feedback from students, employers and advisory committee members, with some employment data were the primary sources for assessment. In light of the current status of assessment in the department, the Evaluation Committee strongly suggests that departmental faculty secure additional training in developing program and course learning outcomes, as well as the implementation of an ongoing, comprehensive assessment program.

Given the substantial enrollment levels, teaching loads are increasing. Increasing the number of instructional aides is helping to reduce the workload of current faculty, however it does not compensate for the additional increase in non-teaching assignments, such as assessment and committee work, which also impact faculty workload.

Faculty in this department, similar to faculty in other departments, indicated problems with the faculty advising system. They felt strongly that all advising should only be done by full-time faculty within the department who have intimate knowledge of the programs and their unique idiosyncrasies.

It appears that the faculty evaluation process primarily relies on the use of student evaluations as the major index to determine faculty effectiveness. Faculty indicated that they receive strong support from the dean to participate in professional development activities. They believe they work with a high level of autonomy, and they feel positive about the current direction of the division.

Although all of the programs have advisory committees, with the exception of the Auto Program, attendance is inconsistent and light. One program indicated they had not been able to have a meeting in over a year despite having called several meetings. The Evaluation Committee suggests that the program(s) should reevaluate membership on the committees and if necessary reconstitute the committee with new members. The Auto Advisory Committee is a shared committee between LCC and several local high schools. A faculty broad based discussion can resolve many issues faced with the Technical Advisory Committees.

Faculty morale is high. Faculty are proud of their involvement in the College and its mission. They support the college mission.

## **WorkFirst**

WorkFirst is a program operated by Lower Columbia College in conjunction with the Washington Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to support students attending LCC who are

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients. The program provides specialized financial aid assistance (WorkFirst Financial Aid). WorkFirst shares facilities with the Adult Basic Education Division. The program manager reports to the instructional dean. Placing WorkFirst within this division supports student success, especially due to the developmental education needs of some WorkFirst students.

WorkFirst is jointly sponsored by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and LCC. As a result, WorkFirst staff work closely with DSHS to design and offer specialized education and training services, as well as credit and non-credit-based courses to meet the needs of LCC students and potential students who are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Funding for the program comes from the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

WorkFirst benefits include WorkFirst Financial Aid (WFFA); TANF Work Study, a program that allows TANF students to supplement their income with part-time work, and specialized classes such as Integrated College Experience (I.C.E.), a “jumpstart” program designed to prepare students for college-level instruction, while incorporating a wide range of life skill strategies to support student success in education and work. Two specialized job-related technology courses – Computer Concepts and Office Skills, offer support and advising, as well as enhance employability.

WorkFirst directly supports the mission and vision of LCC. WorkFirst follows LCC policies and procedures. Hiring of staff and faculty is in accordance with LCC practices. The program has an ongoing system of program evaluation that includes student surveys, student evaluations, faculty evaluation, agency partner feedback, and multiple program performance indicators. It utilizes the college evaluation process to evaluate its instructors, and all credit-based course plans utilize the Curriculum Committee review process.

The program is managed by individuals with substantial community college experience allowing the program to maximize college resources and services for their students. Staff are to be commended for the strong level of support, creativity and passion they bring to the program.

Staff indicate strong support from all sections of the college, in particular the Division Dean and the Vice-President of Instruction. The College is in the process of relocating the program from relatively cramped space in the Instructional Office Building to newly remodeled space in the Admissions Building, allowing the program to serve students more efficiently.

## **Social Sciences, Language and Literature, and Humanities**

The full-time faculty members of the Social Sciences department who met with the Evaluation Committee member indicated that they teach a wide array of classes, including economics, psychology, sociology, early childhood education, anthropology, philosophy, history, political science, humanities, and legal studies. They stated that in several of the disciplines, most notably psychology, the teaching demands are also met by adjunct faculty.



From the Language and Literature department, the faculty members who met with the Evaluator—some full-time, some part-time—indicated that they teach Spanish, English - composition and literature, pre-college reading and writing, college success, and human geography. They stated that the Language and Literature department has eight full-time faculty members and approximately twenty-two adjunct faculty members.

The four full-time Humanities department faculty members that met with the Evaluator represented the disciplines of speech, communications, debate, drama, history, and music. They explained that at one time, the department had been a much larger group of instructors; however, with retirements and hiring freezes, the department has subsequently dwindled to just four faculty members. Supplementing the full-time faculty members are four adjunct instructors in speech and communication, one in choral music, one in jazz/group piano/fundamentals of music, and approximately seven in art.

Although the full-time faculty members were cognizant and understanding of the need to fill instructional gaps with adjunct faculty, and they acknowledged that adjunct instructors are a valuable asset to the College, they expressed considerable angst over the fact that vacated positions are being left unfilled. They also expressed concern over the fact that although it is rare, some adjunct positions are filled just before the start of a quarter, thereby placing the instructors, and more importantly, the students, at a disadvantage because of the negative impact that such short-notice hiring can have on instructional quality. (**Standard 2.A.1 and 2.C.7**)

The Mission of Lower Columbia College 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.**” It was found in meeting with the faculty from the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Language and Literature departments that the faculty members care deeply about the “personal and professional success” of their students. In that regard, the educational programs of the disciplines under consideration are compatible with the institution’s mission (**2.A.2**).

As is the case with all public colleges and universities in Washington, Lower Columbia College operates under the quarter system. The academic calendar is designed to ensure that classes in all formats—lecture, lab, or practicum—have the appropriate number of class sessions to meet the practice common to institutions of higher learning (**2.A 6**).

With the exception of the Early Childhood Education program, which has a specialized curriculum and focus, the curricular offerings within these three departments serve three primary functions: (1) to meet the lower-division needs of students who plan to transfer to four-year institutions, (2) to serve the curricular needs of other programs, and (3) to fulfill the General Education requirements of the College.

In order to facilitate a seamless transition from LCC to four-year schools, Program Planners have been developed for each of the degree programs. Although the outcomes for the degree programs are not published in the College Catalog, they are published in the Program Planners and are readily available to students (**2.B.2**). Since most of the classes from these departments apply toward the AA-DTA or AS-T, the outcomes of those degrees are articulated and assessed in conjunction with the six

General Education Outcomes. The General Education Outcomes were developed by the faculty members and constitute the guiding framework for the outcomes for the classes that fall within those disciplines (**2.B.1**). Assessment of the General Education Outcomes and how they lead to the improvement of teaching and learning are explained in the section on **Policy 2.2 Educational Assessment**.

The academic advising program ostensibly consists of new students being advised initially by an entry advisor at the Admissions Center, after which the students are assigned to faculty members according to the study plans they have indicated. At the forum that took place between the faculty and the evaluation team, and during the meetings with the departmental faculty, the concern was expressed that the system is not working as it should. The evidence seems to call into question whether or not the current system is effective for students, equitable for faculty, and adequate for meeting student needs for information and advice (**2.C.5**).

Another concern that was pervasive during the meetings with the faculty members was the breakdown in communication that they perceive between faculty and senior administration and the perceived lack of the faculty's being included in decision making processes and of having a voice in institutional governance (**Eligibility Requirement 7 Faculty, 4.A.2, 6.D**).

In carrying out their educational duties, the faculty without fail expressed high praise and appreciation for not only the academic freedom that they feel has been accorded them, but also the pedagogical freedom, with the latitude to be innovative, even experimental, in their instructional methodology. This academic freedom enables them to push their teaching efforts to higher levels than they might be able to do if they felt hampered or threatened by the lack of academic freedom.

### **Pre-College Preparation - Transitional and Individual Development (IBEST, ITRAN, ABE, GED, ESL, CEO)**

With the current economy, there has been a drastic increase in community college enrollment. A significant portion of this increase is seen in the rise of the number of students needing pre-college and developmental training. The school has done a remarkable job in maintaining its "open door" policy despite the drastic cutback in funding. It is noted that a significant portion of the increased load has been accepted by full-time faculty agreeing to taken on over-load schedules in order to meet the student demands.

The Pre-College Preparation and Transitional Programs have met the increased demands with a remarkable degree of innovation and creativity. With the administration's encouragement, these programs have moved from the isolated lab-model to an integrated approach to the task of pre-college preparation. The units are taught by a team of two instructors (both in the classroom full-time) using contextualized material and content to maximize the degree of student engagement.

This integrated, contextualized model is epitomized and symbolized by the creation of the learning commons in the Library. This facility is the visual proof of a new sense of engagement and integration. This integrated, contextualized model has taken the pre-college skills and tutoring dynamic out of the darkness of the lab-centered model and brought them into the middle of the

college environment thus allowing all students to be in the bright light and excitement of college level learning. This shift in teaching and learning paradigm has addressed not only the explicit need for skills training, but also the implicit need for self-esteem affirmation.

Much has been said regarding the effectiveness of the IBEST model. The accolades are well deserved. What must be added to this picture is the advent of the ITRANS program and the innovations seen in the ESL and CEO programs. These programs are marked by integration, contextualization, and innovation. In the ESL program, drama is being used as an incentive to encourage the implementation of the speaking component of the curriculum. The ESL students are given the opportunity to participate in a drama written by ESL students and performed by ESL student as a way of helping them break through the barrier of speaking effectiveness in their second language.

It should also be noted that despite the fact the Woodland Center was closed due to budget cuts, the institution found the means by which both the GED and ESL programs were continued. This is to be commended.

Another example of innovation and creativity is found in the Career Education Options. In the foundational quarter of this program, thematic content is used in the skill area of English. Rather than using standardized content for the curriculum, music is being utilized. This shift in content focus has helped guarantee student engagement and increased their sense of ownership. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in retention and completion rates.

## **Policy 2.1 General Education and Related Instruction**

Lower Columbia College has a two-prong General Education Program. The first is described as “General Education Outcomes.” These consist of Citizenship, Communication, Critical Thinking, Interpersonal Skills, Multiculturalism and Numeracy (soon to be changed to Quantitative Literacy). These outcomes are imbedded throughout the curriculum and faculty present evidence to justify that a course qualifies to teach one or more of the outcomes. These outcomes are published in the catalog, on student educational planners, and in course plans. The second prong consists of student requirements to take specific kinds of courses so that they get the breadth of science, computation, communications, social science and other courses as prescribed by the state. Many students see this as the general education program and don’t know a lot about the first prong, but the system works well for them. **(2.C.3)**

The faculty conducts a summer institute where they intensively review student artifacts and assess two of the general education outcomes each year. Recommendations and findings are presented to the entire faculty each fall in a workshop for further comment and examination. This process of examining two outcomes a year has been completed once and changes in wording for clarification and better assessment methods have been developed for two of them.

Curriculum reviews are conducted in each department every four years and most of the faculty seem to use the process with a true spirit of improvement and intent to help the students gain a better education.

Every associate degree has published requirements and each contains the state mandated amount of general education. Every certificate of at least 45 hours also has published and contains communication, computation, and human relations requirements. **(2.C.1, Policy 2.1)**

## **Policy 2.2 Educational Assessment**

### **Introduction**

Lower Columbia College has a comprehensive assessment paradigm that begins at the institutional level of Mission, Vision, and Values, which are supported by seven College Outcomes and their respective Key Performance Indicators. These indices articulate the overarching characteristics and objectives of the College. The College further focuses its College Outcomes by identifying six Strategic Issues to operationalize the College's efforts to accomplish its Mission and College Outcomes. In addition, the College has identified seven Goals which identify tactics that have been implemented to move the College toward fulfillment of its Mission. At the most immediate level, the College Monitoring Report Review Team reviews the different assessment indices on a regular basis and holds an Annual Data Meeting in order to prepare for their Annual Planning Meeting with the College President to identify the Annual Priorities for the following year. The College President takes the feedback and analyses that have been gathered and presents them to the Board of Trustees for their consideration and approval.

It is within this context of fostering a Culture of Evidence at Lower Columbia College that the academic leaders and faculty members strive to integrate assessment activities within the educational enterprise of the College. For the purpose of this report, the following processes have been examined in order to verify that educational assessment is occurring and that it leads to the improvement of teaching and learning:

- 1. General Education Assessment**
- 2. Curriculum Review and Assessment**
- 3. Degree Outcomes**

### **General Education Assessment**

The General Education Assessment process is the means by which the Direct Transfer Agreement Associate in Arts (DTA) and Associate in Science-Transfer (AS-T) Agreement programs are evaluated. Lower Columbia College requires classes that are specified in the following areas:

- **Basic Skills:**
  - Communications (Written and Oral)
  - Quantitative Skills
  
- **Distribution Requirements:**

- Humanities
- Natural Sciences
- Social Sciences

- **Capstone Requirement**
- **Diversity Requirement**

In addition to the distribution requirements just enumerated, the College has identified the following six General Education Outcomes that guide the assessment process:

- 1. Citizenship**
- 2. Communication**
- 3. Critical Thinking**
- 4. Interpersonal Skills**
- 5. Numeracy**
- 6. Multiculturalism**

In order to assess the degree to which the six General Education Outcomes are achieved, the College conducts a weeklong General Education Summer Assessment Institute, during which time the participants focus on two of the six General Education Outcomes. As a result, all six of the outcomes are reviewed and evaluated over a three-year cycle. The Institute takes place outside of the faculty contract, but the participants receive an additional stipend for their time. The faculty members apply for the opportunity to participate at the Summer Assessment Institute and are selected on a competitive basis. During the week, the faculty members review the student artifacts that have been accumulated to represent achievements for their respective classes. The participants have a detailed rubric by which they evaluate the artifacts. Toward the end of the week, they discuss in detail their findings and identify the strengths and challenges that they have encountered. During the fall faculty in-service, the faculty members devote one day to reviewing the findings and recommendations developed by the members of the General Education Summer Assessment Institute.

During one of Assessment Institutes, the faculty members found that students needed help in developing critical thinking skills, so a critical reading course was developed in order to address this deficiency. In addition, the students garnered low ratings for multiculturalism. Consequently, the courses that fulfill the multiculturalism requirement were reviewed and revised as needed. The class list was reviewed and revised. During the summer 2010 Summer Assessment Institute, it was found that the artifacts for the interpersonal skills requirement did not square up with the expected outcomes. Therefore, consideration is being given to modifying the classes that satisfy the interpersonal skills requirement.

Another assessment measure that the faculty members find especially significant is the capstone class that is required of all students receiving the DTA. The capstone class is conducted in seminar format, is interdisciplinary, and requires a research paper of substance. A review of the numerous research papers that were made available in the resource room provided ample evidence of a remarkably high level of critical thinking and writing skills by the students.

## **Curriculum Review and Assessment**

Faculty members conduct curriculum reviews as a part of their assessment process. The curriculum review follows a standardized template in which they (1) articulate the mission of the program; (2) enumerate the intended outcomes for the program; (3) explain how the outcomes are communicated to the students; (4) identify the curriculum that will lead the students to the achievement of the program outcomes; (5) indicate any changes that might be necessary in order to enhance the program; (6) explicate the rationale for the curriculum design; (7) evaluate adequacy of resources made available for the program; and (8) develop an action plan for effecting improvement of the program. The curriculum reviews are submitted to the Vice President of Instruction for review and approval.

Another significant component of the curriculum review process, particularly for the professional-technical programs, is the use of Program Advisory Committees. Washington statutes mandate that professional technical programs must have advisory committees and that they must meet at least twice a year and include labor and management. It was found that some of the professional technical programs have active and functioning advisory committees, but some others were not functioning well. It was also found that a small number of programs have non-functioning advisory committees that need to become viable, not only in order to meet the assessment needs of the program, but also in order to meet the requirements imposed by the state of Washington and to be in compliance with NWCCU Policy 2.2.

## **Degree Outcomes**

The College has prepared a Program Planner for all of its certificate and degree programs. The Program Planner includes (1) all of the program and degree requirements; (2) a program description; (3) a suggested scope and sequence for schedule planning; and (4) the learning outcomes for each degree program.

In addition to the General Education assessment processes that have been developed for the AA-DTA and AS-T degrees, the College has identified methods for assessing the degree to which students are meeting the outcomes of its professional technical programs by using professionally recognized tests and certifications. However, as valuable as those performance measures are, it was found that some of the professional-technical programs need to become more systematic and comprehensive in their program assessment efforts, taking their efforts beyond the use of tests and certifications.

## **Conclusion**

The faculty members at Lower Columbia College, for the most part, appear to understand the importance of assessment and are making credible strides in their efforts to create a Culture of Evidence. The financial commitment that the College administration has made to provide stipends for participants in the General Education Summer Assessment Institute is especially commendable. It is imperative that the College continue to move forward in its assessment activities. Furthermore, it is likewise incumbent upon the College to closely monitor and motivate the faculty members of the programs where assessment activities still need to be enhanced. Finally, the College must produce tangible and meaningful evidence that assessment activities lead to the improvement of teaching and learning. **(Standard 2.B.3, Policy 2.2 )**

## **Policy 2.6 Distance Delivery of Courses, Certificate, and Degree Programs**

The Self-Study prepared by Lower Columbia College treated its delivery of distance education with several short excerpts interspersed in Standards One and Two, and with a fair amount of detail in its treatment of **Standard 2.G.5**. However, the Self-Study did not specifically address **Policy 2.6 *Distance Delivery of Courses, Certificate, and Degree Programs***. This analysis and evaluation of **Policy 2.6** was derived primarily from visiting with members of the eLearning staff, with additional input from college staff and faculty members.

## **Academic Programming via Online Delivery**

Distance education at Lower Columbia College saw its genesis in approximately 1995 when it participated in the Washington Online (WAOL) initiative. However, the College's successful application for a Title III grant in 2003 provided funding to purchase the ANGEL online platform, which significantly propelled its capability to develop its online programming. In the ensuing years, the College has experienced exponential growth in developing a vibrant and robust distance education program that today includes the LPN2RN program, Rural Outreach Nursing Education (RONE), and the AA-DTA program—all online.

### **Modality Levels**

The delivery of online instruction occurs at the following modality levels:

- **Online:** Instruction occurs exclusively in an electronically mediated format.
- **Hybrid:** Part of the class delivery is online and part is face-to face, resulting in reduced seat time.
- **Enhanced:** Class delivery is entirely face-to-face; online enhancements do not affect seat time.
- **Informational:** Class delivery is entirely face-to-face; only basic class business is conducted online.

It should be noted that data from 2004 to the present also include the modalities of Telecourse, Correspondence, ITV, and TeleClass at LCC. However, the enrollment from those modalities has declined so sharply that as of 2009 -2010 it is practically non-existent; therefore, this analysis does not include treatment of those modalities.

## **Faculty Selection, Training, and Compensation**

Online courses are developed by the faculty members. They can request to develop and teach an online class, or their respective dean may opt to recruit them. If faculty members identify a class that they believe will be beneficial to the instructional program offerings, they first consult with their respective department chair. Once they have the approval of the chair, they confer with their respective dean to get his/her approval.

If faculty members are developing their first online class, they are required to take an eight-week online class called Introduction to ANGEL for Instructors. The curriculum for that class provides thorough training to prospective online instructors. They can also watch tutorial videos that have been prepared by the eLearning Manager and placed on YouTube. While they are taking this training class, they work on the course they propose to offer online.

Once they finish developing the class, they notify their dean, who according to his/her professional discretion, determines if the class can be offered online. The faculty members are then paid their stipend for developing their class, in accordance with the Course Development Stipend Guidelines.

## **Quality Assurance and Course Approval**

Other than the requirement that online and face-to-face classes must have the same learning outcomes and comparable assessment indices, the processes of quality assurance and course approval are essentially left to the discretion of the faculty member's respective dean. If the class being developed is entirely new to the curriculum, it must be approved by the Curriculum Committee. However, if the class is already in the curriculum, the new online class represents only a modality change and no additional formal approvals are required. Initial planning and training is underway to pilot the use of the Quality Matters evaluation rubric of online classes. This is a positive step forward and it is suggested that the College consider a more formal and systematic way of approving classes that have been developed for online delivery, not only as a means of ensuring quality, but also as a means of ensuring equitable treatment of classes across the various disciplines and programs (**Standard 2.A.7 and Policy 2.6**).

## **Faculty Interaction with Students**

The expectation placed upon faculty to respond to their online students is the same as it is for their on-campus students: 24 hours to respond to emails and one week to return assignments and tests. There is some flexibility in this expectation to account for weekends and holidays.

## **Academic Ownership**

According to the Dean of Instructional Programs who supervises eLearning, if an instructor develops a class and receives a college stipend or uses college resources, the College retains ownership of the class that has been developed for online delivery. If an instructor develops a class strictly on his or her own time, using strictly his or her own resources, the instructor retains ownership of the class. At the forum that took place between the evaluation team and the faculty, some faculty members expressed uncertainty over the policy of online course ownership. It is suggested that steps be taken to ensure that all faculty are aware of the policy for academic ownership of classes that are developed for online delivery (**Policy 2.6**).

## **Student Success**

## **Marketing and Recruitment**



When asked about marketing and recruitment measures that are carried out for the eLearning program, the eLearning Manager indicated that LCC's distance learning program is so popular that minimal marketing has been needed. Flyers are distributed at ANGEL Orientation and ANGEL Boot Camp. They are also given to the entry advisors and to the students who participate in WorkFirst and ABE.

### **Academic Support**

The eLearning office is located in the Learning Commons. This is the ideal location for ensuring that students who are taking online or hybrid courses are able to receive the library support that they need. Students are able to access a wide array of eBooks, Gale's Virtual Reference Library, links from the LCC Library page, and data bases that can be reached from the ANGEL course site. In addition, the College belongs to the Northwest Consortium, which makes 24-hour tutoring available to students.

For acquiring textbooks, students can access the LCC online bookstore or they can use other commercial online book sources. The World Wide Web makes textbook acquisition very easy.

### **Enrollment**

Since 2004, online enrollment has gone from 53.8 FTEs for online classes to an astonishing 409.13 FTEs for online classes and 180.97 FTEs for hybrid classes. Lower Columbia College is managing to capture an enormous share of the online market.

### **Retention**

A table showing the completion rate of students who receive a C grade (2.0) or better have been consistently at, if not above, the Washington state average. For example, in the fall of 2007 the completion rate of LCC online classes was 67.7%. The Washington average was 65.8%. In the fall of 2008, the completion rate of LCC online classes was 74.6%. The Washington average was 69.4%.

Initiatives that have been implemented to minimize class attrition include the ANGEL Orientation for students, as well as the ANGEL Boot Camp, a 3 ½ - hour intensive training session. In addition, students taking online classes, particularly General Education classes, are required to take the COMPASS test in conjunction with the College's mandatory placement program. This ensures student ability to benefit from taking an online class.

### **Student Satisfaction**

Student satisfaction is assessed through the use of online student surveys, using the same form that is used for face-to-face classes.

### **Conclusion**

Lower Columbia College has positioned itself as one of the leaders of online education within the state of Washington. The RONE and LPN2RN online programs have enabled LCC to address a critical need for nurses at rural healthcare facilities, which struggle to attract nurses to their remote areas. By making RN training available to residents already living in rural areas, the nursing program is helping the rural communities become self-reliant in meeting their healthcare needs. The DT-A online program is likewise poised to provide higher education opportunities to people who are place bound or trying to juggle family, work, and school at the same time.

## **STANDARD THREE – Students**

### **Purpose and Organization**

Lower Columbia College Student Services programs and services connect in a meaningful way to the institution’s mission and goals. The Student Services staff have organized programs and services to support learning and student development. Lower Columbia College Student Services staff continue to provide the essential student support services in spite of significant budget challenges.

The purpose and organization of Student Services is adequate in providing services to the students of Lower Columbia College. Despite budget cuts, Student Services staff have maintained a high level of student-centered service. The Vice-President for Student Services reports to the President and serves as the chief student affairs officer. This position represents Student Services in all major college issues, budgeting, policy development and planning efforts.

Lower Columbia College Student Services are staffed by dedicated individuals, who have the appropriate academic preparation and experience and are qualified for their roles. The organization of Student Services has been responsive to increasing student numbers in a time of significant budgetary limitations.

Appropriate policies and procedures exist for Student Services programs and activities. Students are formally included in the process of influencing college policies. Students participate in standing institution-wide committees. Their input is solicited on policy and procedural issues. Student leaders credit the administration for seeking and including their feedback in decision-making.

Lower Columbia College Student Services are innovative and clearly directed at supporting the mission and strategic goals of the institution. There is concern about the vacancies within the Student Services area, especially with the unprecedented growth LCC has experienced.

### **General Responsibilities**

Lower Columbia College provides student services on the basis of its assessment of student needs and adequately supports those services with staff, adequate facilities (with the exception, noted below, of the financial aid offices), and resources. A wide variety of assessments, surveys, and annual data collections and reviews are used to identify student characteristics, and are incorporated

into institutional efforts to respond to student needs.

Through a variety of assessment processes, student service units demonstrate continuous improvement at the individual unit level. The results from the “Community College Survey of Student Engagement” and the “National Community College Benchmarking Project” provide national comparison data that LCC Student Services uses to measure their effectiveness. Additionally, student opinion surveys such as the “Student Services Survey,” “Running Start Survey,” “Counseling Survey,” “Transfer Student Alumni Survey,” and “Graduate Survey” provide useful information about student perceptions, use, and satisfaction of most areas of Student Services. There is evidence that the use of these surveys and assessments has led to improvement and change at the unit level and within Student Services as a whole.

Lower Columbia College publishes a college catalog, schedule of classes, and other publications that provide complete and accurate information about its academic programs, courses and course descriptions, academic policies, requirements, and other essential information for prospective and admitted students. These publications and references also contain information about policies for the general student population, specifying student rights, responsibilities and procedural rights. The student grievance procedure was described as vague and burdensome and appeared to be difficult for a student to follow, although it is available in a number of publications. The institution may want to review this policy.

## **Academic Credit and Records**

Evaluation of learning and the awarding of credit are based on clear and distinguishable criteria. Academic records are accurate, comprehensive, securely stored in paper form onsite in a secure area. Additionally, the college is moving to scanned, electronic records as staffing permits. Student records are private, accurate, complete, and permanent. Data maintained electronically are adequately secured and routinely backed up. Records are maintained for current and past Lower Columbia College students. Institutional publications clearly indicate how credit will be utilized to fulfill degree requirements. Transfer credit is accepted only from accredited institutions. Transfer policies are consistent with **Policy 2.5**. The institution has published procedures to guide the release of student information. Student confidentiality is assured.

The college admits students consistent with its mission of meeting the educational needs of individuals, businesses, and its community, and an array of student support services are in place to assist students in accomplishing their goals. Clear admission policies and procedures are published. LCC adheres to these policies in its practice of admitting students.

## **Advising and Counseling**

Assessment and placement procedures are in place to assure students are guided to the correct course level. This assessment information is used by the advising staff to provide students with an initial plan of enrollment. In addition to advisor generalists, LCC employs an advisor assigned to pre-nursing students. College Counseling Services are available as well to provide personal and career counseling.

Lower Columbia College publishes academic progress standards that outline the requirements for continuing in its educational programs. Included in this policy is an appropriate appeal process. Institutional program requirements are contained in the college catalog and are applied consistently. The Student Right-to-Know Act information is available and included in publications as required by law.

## **Financial Aid**

The institution provides a program of financial assistance for students, and relevant policies and procedures are clearly and consistently stated in campus publications. Lower Columbia College regularly monitors the loan default rate of its former students and has treatments in place to help reduce its student loan default rate. The Financial Aid staff have made progress this past quarter in streamlining the financial aid process, especially through the use of the on-line FAFSA and scholarship applications. There has been a dramatic increase in the amount of aid awarded with no corresponding increase in financial aid staff. This has resulted in significant delays during peak times.

## **Food Services and Bookstore**

Food services are supervised by trained food service staff and meet recognized nutritional and mandated health and safety standards. The college bookstore supports the education program. Students, faculty, and staff have the opportunity to participate in the development and monitoring of bookstore policies and procedures. Students stated satisfaction with these services. Evaluation Committee members used the college food services during the on-campus visit, which gave the members additional opportunities to discuss issues with Lower Columbia College students.

## **Athletics**

Intercollegiate athletics is an important component of the college experience for many students attending Lower Columbia College. The operations of athletic programs are consistent with the educational mission and goals of the institution and are conducted with oversight by the Athletic Director and the Vice-President for Student Services.

The goals and objectives of the intercollegiate athletic program are communicated to staff members, and policies concerning athletics are reviewed annually by the Vice-President for Student Services. Admission requirements, procedures, and degree requirements are the same for student athletes as they are for the general student population. Athletic budget development and control is aligned with institutional policy and practice.

Lower Columbia College is committed to the fair and equitable treatment of both male and female athletes with respect to opportunities for participation in intercollegiate athletics. LCC will reactivate its suspended women's soccer program to continue to meet the proportionality requirements under Title IX.

## **Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status**

Lower Columbia College consistently demonstrates integrity and responsibility in how it represents itself in its advertising, student recruitment, publications (especially the quarterly schedule and catalog) and promotional literature. The college catalog indicates LCC is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

## **Student Services**

Lower Columbia College has developed several noteworthy programs designed to support student access and success. Among these are the collaboration between faculty, Student Support Services and Financial Aid on the Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship. Over the past four years, two LCC students were chosen for this highly selective honor. The Washington State “Running Start” program at Lower Columbia College has been effectively and thoughtfully supervised and provides significant support and direction to the high school students in this dual-credit program. The Athletics Department has a well-structured and consistently enforced “Athletic Study Table” to support academic achievement. There is a strong, well-coordinated partnership between the college, various community organizations and businesses to assist displaced workers. In each of these programs, faculty and Student Services staff members collaborate in support of student success.

The Committee recognizes the College for its active commitment to student access and success through its exemplary services, experiences, and opportunities. This was especially evident in the energy and attention given to the collaboration between LCC and its area high schools. Noteworthy examples were the carefully designed and administered “Running Start” program, dual advisory committees in career and technical education, and creative high school diploma completion efforts.

The Committee expressed concern with the Financial Aid resources of staffing and physical location. The Financial Aid Office is in an open, 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. The number of staff members appears to be inadequate to meet the increase in student demand.

## **STANDARD FOUR – Faculty**

### **Introduction**

Lower Columbia College has maintained a highly dedicated faculty despite the increased demands placed on the faculty due to budget reduction. This fact speaks highly of the quality and commitment of the faculty, part-time as well as full-time.

The institution employs highly qualified faculty with primary commitment to the institution. Faculty participate in academic planning. They control the curriculum, and they have salaries and benefits that are adequate to attract and retain competent faculty.

The institution fosters an environment of academic freedom for faculty. Although workloads have increased for all positions in the institution, faculty workloads and compensation are consistent with written policies and contracts.

The college administration has funded the Summer Assessment Institute, which has become rather competitive. Faculty are encouraged to participate in both scholarly activity and research. Multiple examples of scholarly activity were presented to the Evaluation Committee. There is concern that as the number of full time faculty decrease and enrollment numbers increase, faculty may not have the available time necessary for professional development. Faculty are currently accorded the academic freedom to pursue scholarship and artistic creation. Funding for professional development is a concern faced by every department on campus.

### **Policy 4.1 - Faculty Evaluation**

Lower Columbia College has a clear outline for the evaluation of full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and pre-tenured faculty. The faculty evaluation process appears to over-emphasize the “student evaluation” component. Other indices are enumerated in the “The Agreement,” but it does not appear they are being used by some faculty. There appears to be inconsistencies in the non-student components of the tenured faculty evaluation process. Precise evaluation procedures for full-time tenured faculty appear to be casual. The Committee found some faculty confused with the process and specific evaluation procedures. Evaluation processes may be informal, but with the exception of student course evaluations, some members of the faculty could not present evidence of the other types of evaluation that were used in their evaluation.

The Evaluation Committee believes that careful attention should be given to faculty evaluation. Given the increased demands on the faculty, attention to the evaluation process would help assure continued instructional quality in the classroom. It would provide substantiation for the expectation of the institution and the performance of the faculty member. Faculty are encouraged to participate in the review of policies and practices that govern faculty evaluation, and to consider updating the current practice.

## **STANDARD FIVE – Library and Information Resources**

### **Purpose and Scope**

Several years ago, The College began the transition to a “Learning Commons” model of providing information resources and services to respond to rapidly evolving virtual information landscapes and technologies that support teaching and learning in higher education. The Learning Commons includes Library Services, eLearning, Tutoring Services, and Self –Paced Learning. The Information Technology Services Department, recently located in the same building, is closely associated with the Learning Commons and is clearly an essential component in supporting the activities of the Learning Commons. The reconfiguration has combined staff, resources, and technologies in an open accessible space to support the vision statement of the Learning Commons.

**“Our vision is to be a welcoming, integrated, and collaborative learning environment that serves as a vital resource for academic support and life-long learning to the college and community.”**

There were a number of opportunities during the visit to observe students using the open computer lab, tutoring services, library services, and study spaces in the Learning Commons. Interviews with staff supported the impression that they truly collaborate and support one another to provide exceptional service. It was not surprising to see that the Learning Commons has documented a significant increase in usage over the past two years.

## **Adequacy of Resources**

The Library provides an array of resources to support student learning. Collections include books, audiovisual materials, course reserve materials, periodicals, and electronic resources accessible via the web. The online catalog includes the collections of Longview Public Library and Kelso Public Library. This reflects a long-standing agreement between the three libraries and expands the resources available. The library web page is well-designed; a good starting point for students. Downloadable research guides are available on the web page and also in the Learning Commons/Library.

Tutoring services are available for individual students and groups in the Learning Commons. Trained tutors can assist with many college subjects, as general study skills or writing and composition. Tutoring services appears to be in high-demand judging from the number of students observed in that area during the visit. Students can check the tutoring services schedule on the web to find out who is available at a particular time and what subjects are covered by individual tutors. An additional resource is Self-Paced Learning for students who need help to improve study skills, reading, writing, basic math and Spanish grammar. Students must come to the library to meet with the Self-Paced Learning instructor and support staff.

Support Services for the ANGEL Learning Management System (LMS) is an integral part of the Learning Commons with two full-time staff and work-study students to support faculty and students using the LMS. There is an instructional area adjacent to the eLearning office where staff teach Introduction to ANGEL and ANGEL Boot Camp classes for students. Drop-in help is available in the eLearning office which has computers, printers and two interactive white boards for faculty/staff use. College faculty members who want to use ANGEL must complete a (required) eight-week online course before they teach their first course online. Library resources for eLearning, such as 24 hour reference services and links to subscription databases (e.g. Gale Reference databases, CINAHL, and Proquest), are included in ANGEL.

Information Technology Services (ITS) supports technology resources across the campus with network infrastructure and tech support that permeates every aspect of instructional programs, student support services and administration. The department moved into the Library, which is near the Learning Commons. This facilitates access to tech support for eLearning, Smart classroom technology in the library, and the student computer lab (55 workstations on the first floor). There are

eight general use computers labs on campus and eight other labs that support specialized instructional programs (e.g. Math and Chemistry).

The campus wireless network was upgraded in 2009 and is integrated with the main network. The “virtualization” of the campus network is progressing. There are many advantages to be gained from going to a virtual model. When it is fully implemented there will be considerable savings realized in reduced energy consumption, lower equipment replacement costs, and less expensive licensing agreements. Most importantly, the virtual model will improve the user’s experience.

There is a technology replacement plan that covers goals, criteria, and equipment replacement for staff, faculty and students/classroom environments. The implementation of the plan is contingent on funding. However, no deficiencies were noted during the evaluation.

End-user support for technology services is available by phoning the help desk or submitting an email request. On-campus help is available in computer labs or the Learning Commons, where staff can resolve problems, such as resetting a user profile.

Media Services is part of Information Technology Services. As instructional technologies and media have changed, the old-style “copy and deliver” services are a shrinking part of the service model. Media services staff are updating classrooms with a range of equipment to enhance the learning environment. They have digital video production capabilities and recently produced video for the I-Best program and the College Foundation. The program works closely with Disability Services to install software for sign language interpretation and closed captioning for digital media.

## **Information Resources and Services**

The library’s mission statement, approved by the Collection Development Committee in December 2008, expresses a commitment to “**maintain a physical and virtual teaching and learning environment that promotes academic inquiry, supports instruction and scholarship, and fosters lifelong intellectual growth and discovery ...**” A collection development policy, also approved by the Collection Development committee, is consistent with the mission and details the primary criteria for materials selection including 1) Relevance to and consistency with the general educational goals of the College and the objectives of specific courses; 2) Relevance to the instructional and work-related needs of the library’s primary users.

The circulating book collection is readily accessible on the second floor of the Learning Commons. The holdings count is just under 39,860 (2008 data). There is room for expansion on the shelves. Selection of new materials is governed by a Collection Development policy. Removing items from the collection is also governed by that policy. Staff and faculty review items that have been “deselected” before those items are withdrawn. The collection maintenance report (2008-2009) indicates that more items were deleted in that period than were added. This is a necessary part of the collection development process and is indicative of the collaboration between library staff and faculty in making decisions about the aging of the collection and ensuring the collection reflects current needs.



## **Support for Users**

Research databases and eBooks expand the availability of resources to library users. They are accessible anytime-anywhere via the internet and accessed via the Library's web page. Library Services Database Usage Report for 2009-2010 tracks inside and remote access searches for the Gale databases. For every database there were more remote access searches than inside searches and there were 45,297 total annual searches for all databases in the Gale package. This is indicative of considerable value added for library users. The most frequently used subscription database outside the Gale database package was Proquest with a total annual search count of 71,434. The library services acquisition budget reflects the increasing institutional commitment to support electronic databases.

Library Services provides support for users in the Learning Commons. The overarching goal is to help students learn to be effective, independent, and successful users of information resources. Librarians have developed a strong information literacy program with instruction customized to suit instructor/student course requirements. Information literacy courses are taught every quarter. For students enrolled in online or hybrid courses, library resources are incorporated into the ANGEL LMS. Assistance is available at the reference desk 50 hours per week. There are additional resources available on the Web through the library's Web page including research guides and videos. Students can access help by telephone, email, chat, and/or use the 24/7 virtual reference support service.

Librarians have worked with faculty members to integrate information literacy outcomes and assessments into their courses. This activity is evaluated through the annual student surveys, employee surveys, and course/orientation evaluations.

Policies and procedures related to the development and management of library services and information resources are readily available to students and staff of the college on the library web page.

Collection development is a very important responsibility intended to assure that the collection remains relevant and congruent with the programs, courses and research needs of the college community. Collection development is a collaborative process involving librarians, other library staff members, and the Information Technology Services Director as participants on the Collection Development Committee. A librarian serves on the Curriculum Committee. Course plans include a question about library holdings to guide faculty to consider what additional information resources should be required to support student learning.

## **Facilities and Access**

The library is centrally located on the campus, integrated into the Learning Commons, in an attractive and well-maintained facility. Although the building was not originally designed for the multipurpose learning commons approach, remodeling and addition of new areas resulted in an interior design that accommodates the variety of activities currently provided.

The Learning Commons has functional areas for library services including circulation, course reserves, reference and information services, a periodical display area and quiet study rooms. There is a small room upstairs for archival materials. Although the first floor is buzzing with activity most of the day, there is plenty of seating upstairs for students to study quietly in areas close to the book stacks.

In addition to the usual library services, the first floor also has tutoring services, the eLearning office, a presentation area for student orientation or faculty workshops, and the computer lab area with 55 computers.

The Learning Commons is open six days per week. The library catalog and electronic resources are available to authenticated users off-campus 24/7 from any computer that can connect to the internet. The physical collection of books, DVDs, videos and periodicals is available during open hours.

In order to increase the range and availability of resources (especially electronic resources), the library participates in a number of resource-sharing arrangements. These include the local library network for the OPAC (Longview-Kelso Public and College library system). A copy of this contract was provided in the exhibits. The library also participates in the Orbis Cascade Alliance (public and academic libraries in Oregon and Washington), and the Washington State Library System which provide reduced rates for electronic resources.

## **Personnel and Management**

All professional and technical support staff in the Library and Learning Commons are well qualified and experienced. Library services staff hold appropriate degrees. They have many years of professional library experience. There has been an effort to cross-train and acquaint all staff with some degree of knowledge about different services areas. During the group interview with staff members, several people talked about the ease of redirecting students to other people in the library/learning commons for help. They appreciate being able to take the student to someone with the skills and expertise to resolve a particular problem or query.

Staff members in Information Technology Services possess the educational background, degrees, and training required to support the complex information infrastructure, instructional technologies, and associated services require of this department. Some are working on advanced degrees. Others have AA degrees and certificates related to their positions, such as A+ certification, Windows Server and Desktop, MCSE, MCP and Cybersecurity certificate. A departmental goal is to provide one to three weeks of training for each staff member every year. To help prepare for technologies to be implemented next year, staff will be trained for Microsoft Windows 7 and Server 2008. Four staff members will go for Cisco VoIP training.

Funds are available for professional development for staff in the Learning Commons. Several paraprofessional staff members have completed advanced degrees. Staff members are encouraged to participate in workshops sponsored by various professional associations and through the State Library.

The Library Director and a librarian are members of the curriculum development committee which reviews new and revised course plan proposals. The course plan proposal for includes a question regarding the need for information resources and/or technical support from Integrated Technology Services. Needs identified through the course approval process are addressed to ensure that collections and services meet instructional and program requirements.

In the past few years, the college has supported the Library and Learning Commons with funds for remodeling, additional staff, and additional funds for electronic resources. Because the Learning Commons has been successful in increasing the use of library services and other services located in the Learning Commons, staffing levels are being reviewed. Finding the resources for additional staff may be the greatest challenge in the near future as fiscal constraints affect all area of the college.

Information Technology Services has also been well-supported by the college and the entire campus community has benefitted from investments in this area. As noted above, the virtualization of the campus network will reduce costs associated with energy consumption, equipment replacement, and the purchase/renewal of software licensing agreements. The equipment replacement plan is critical to maintaining essential campus-wide connections and services.

## **Planning and Evaluation**

The units within the Learning Commons collaborate in planning and evaluation to address the needs of the campus community. Administrators, faculty and staff participate in the Learning Commons Steering Committee. There is a Learning Commons Mission Statement that expresses the overarching mission, vision, outcomes, and goals.

One of the tools used to assess desired outcomes is the annual Student Satisfaction Survey. The survey includes questions about Library Services, Tutoring, and eLearning. The 2009 survey included sixteen questions about services provided by (or associated with) units within the Learning Commons. Fourteen of the questions were new – reflecting the relatively recent co-location of academic support (tutoring and eLearning) and library services.

Organizational linkages are maintained through established reporting relationships, regular staff meetings and committee meetings. As mentioned previously, Library Services has two representatives on the Curriculum Committee. That committee, through the Vice President of Instruction, provides a mechanism for monthly communication with the College's Operations Council.

## **STANDARD SIX - Governance and Administration**

### **Governance System**

The Lower Columbia College Board of Trustees has adopted a policy governance model of leadership to “**govern Lower Columbia College in accordance with the Constitution and the**

**Community and Technical College Act of the State of Washington. The Board will always act in the best interest of the College and the community as a whole. The Board is committed to excellence in educational programs and other services of the College and availability to all people.”**

The Board of Trustees regularly revisits the College Outcomes by holding an annual planning session to improve its performance through education. The Board agrees to govern as a body and not as individual members. All matters require a majority vote of the members when a quorum is present. The Trustees select and evaluate the President. They delegate to him the authority to employ administrators, faculty, and staff, and to operate the College on a daily basis. The President also serves as Secretary to the Board.

The Board of Trustees is composed of five members who are appointed by the Governor and whose duties are described in state law. Other state agencies and boards with authority for some aspects of the system and college operations include:

- Higher Education Coordinating Board
- Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board
- Washington Personnel Resources Board
- Office of Financial Management
- Department of General Administration
- Office of the Attorney General

College documents detail governance structure and relationships. The Revised code of Washington (RCW) section 28B.50 (Community and Technical Colleges) specifies the laws guiding the operations of community and technical college in the state of Washington. Roles and responsibilities are defined in the two collective bargaining agreements, committee bylaws, and College policies and procedures. Student rights are defined in the bylaws for the Associated Students of Lower Columbia College.

Based on the system of Policy Governance, the President leads College administration. He delegates authority to other administrators, including the vice presidents, deans, and directors to manage the day to day details. The college administration is respected and viewed as “making decisions that are in the best interest of The College.

The role of the faculty is key to the College effort to carry out its fundamental mission: to ensure the educational success of students. They carry out that role in classroom and laboratory instruction, curriculum development, conferences with students, academic advising, and other activities. Faculty also participate on many committees. Through the Curriculum Committee and various discipline discussions, it is clear that the faculty own the academic curriculum at Lower Columbia College.

In spite of the fact that there are multiple opportunities for participation, there was concern expressed, both in the Self-Study document and during the on campus interviews, that the faculty role in shared governance may be confusing. In a review of College policies, the Committee identified policies that may need clarity to ensure a better understanding of roles and responsibilities. While the policies currently exist, the verbiage is extremely general and broad based. If members of the college community are confused about the delegation of authority and their role in shared governance, clarity in the individual policies could strengthen college governance.

The College President is a full-time employee of the College. While the President is given considerable flexibility to govern the College, he is also held to high standards of conduct, communication with the Board, and interaction with other parties who might be affected by his actions. It is clear that the President of Lower Columbia College has had to make some very difficult decisions during his tenure as the President, but students, faculty and staff credit his ability to work under pressure, listen to concerns, and make the difficult decisions.

The administrators of Lower Columbia College fully understand their duties, responsibilities, and ethical conduct requirements. All of the administrators are well qualified for their positions. Many of them have served the College for a long time and have risen through the ranks from faculty or classified status to their current positions. While the Self-Study stated a new evaluation process for administrators, some College employees were not aware of the evaluation procedures for administrators, nor had they participated in such evaluations. Their participation is not written into the college policy. This is an example of another area where The College may be well-served to review its current policy and procedures, and consider an update or modification to the existing policy.

The Lower Columbia College Foundation is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) corporation established in 1976. The mission of the Foundation is to provide financial supplements to Lower Columbia College where public funds are not sufficient; to encourage public support for the College; and to strengthen the teaching, learning, and cultural environment of the College and the community.

The Foundation is governed by an all-volunteer Board of Directors composed of men and women from the community who seek to advance the College as a powerful force for the quality of life in our community. The College Foundation staff is comprised of an Executive Director, a resource developer and an accountant.

The Foundation has successfully conducted fund raising activities for more than thirty years. Funds are currently used to purchase instructional equipment, award grants, scholarships, and an Exceptional Faculty Endowment. In 2008-2009 the Foundation support totaled \$470,000. The LCC Foundation recently completed its first major gift campaign. While fundraising was successful, the Foundation was unable to support the campus grant program in 2009-2010. This was a responsible and necessary decision.

Leadership in the Foundation is strong. Efforts are recognized and respected by the internal and external community. Communication with alumni and friends is strengthened by the publication and distribution of a newsletter, The Catalyst. Event information and stories about students, staff, and alumni are showcased in each newsletter.

Research and assessment data collection, analysis, and dissemination are the responsibility of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. In addition to serving on the Assessment Committee, the Director is a member of the General Education Committee. College documents on assessment, planning and budget were provided in the Self-Study and in the exhibits. Members of the college community were not only aware of the assessment activities, but they were also respectful of the progress the institution had made in institutional effectiveness. The President supports assessment activities, and the results of assessment and planning are used as the platform for decision-making. Academic faculty believe the assessment process to be transparent. They are also satisfied with their ability to find the information they need when they need it.

The College attracts qualified candidates for the majority of the open positions. Salaries are competitive in most areas. The College has lost some of its senior employees due to recent retirements and budget reductions. While this has helped with the budget problem, it is also recognized as a negative due to the loss of institutional history.

Opportunity for faculty participation in college governance is available, but participation varies among the faculty. Faculty are represented on most college committees, but opportunities for part-time faculty to participate in departmental governance vary from department to department. For example, some part-time faculty advise students and accept leadership roles. In other departments their participation may be limited to attendance at meetings.

Students are provided a variety of opportunities for leadership experience. The Associated Students of Lower Columbia College (ASLCC) directs and manages the affairs of the student body at LCC. Members propose activity and service fees, expenditure of funds to clubs, athletics, entertainment, and campus-wide special events. The ASLCC President or Vice Presidents attend all Board of Trustee meetings and present reports detailing ASLCC activities and issues of importance to the student body. Student opinions and suggestions are solicited by both the faculty and the administration.

Lower Columbia College participates in the National Community College Benchmarking Project. This allows the institution to begin comparing participation rates of minority staff to peer colleges across the nation. The College is well below the median ranking in terms of the ratio of employees of color compared to the surrounding service district. The College has developed an Affirmative Action Plan, which is revised regularly according to a state-mandated schedule. The College has recognized its need to increase diversity. Current budget reductions and hiring freezes slow this process, but the institution has asserted its commitment to diversity.

The two bargaining units that represent employee groups, bring issues to the Governance Council or the Union-Management Communication Committee—each a labor/management forum. Faculty are represented by LCCFAHE and classified staff are represented by the Washington Federation of State Employees Higher Education. The classified contracts are negotiated through the Governor's Office for the entire state with ratification at an institutional level. Faculty contracts are negotiated between the College and the association, with ratification by the Board of Trustees.

In recent years, contract negotiations have been smooth, and formal grievances have been rare. Employee satisfaction is generally strong, although policy revision may provide increased understanding and clarity in the roles and authority of faculty and staff. Continuous communication is essential given the current budget situation. The College may want to investigate the increased use of a College Intranet for internal communication on college matters. While there is a current use of the Intranet, it appears to be more of a venue for announcements. A vital part of internal communication, a College Intranet could be utilized as an information source and an immediate posting of critical changes or decisions.

As identified in the Self-Study, the College needs to continue to increase the recruitment and retention of minority faculty and staff. This effort may be supported by a campus-wide Diversity Committee. The College has taken the first steps at addressing an important issue.

Also, the institution may want to consider measures for campus climate as an additional effort to improve communication, understanding, and a benchmark measure for comparisons with peer institutions. Leadership throughout the College received high regard from the internal and external

communities. Leadership also expressed high regard for the excellent and committed staff and faculty of Lower Columbia College.

## **STANDARD SEVEN -Finance**

### **Financial Planning**

Trustees seem to have a solid grasp of funding priorities and expressed confidence in the ability of the President and Administration to manage the budget. However, the Board did not seem to have a firm grasp on major components of the budget. Recent changes in staff appear to be fostering a new level of education and transparency for the board. Staff have developed new budget documents to show expenditures for functional areas (i.e., instruction, institutional support) and for type of expenditure (i.e., personal services, current expense). While board members have taken an appropriate “hands on, fingers out” approach, it is still important for individual members to have better knowledge of how funds are allocated to properly perform their oversight role. More reliance on trend analysis of budgets would help the trustees gain a better grasp of overall budgeting.

Even though budget decisions are dispersed throughout all units of campus, it appears that some do not feel they have a participatory role. Budget documents are available to provide historical data for previous years, allowing campus stakeholders to compare changes across years. Budget updates are provided during the year at meetings and announced via campus-wide email, but attendance at these meetings is often sparse. Given that the budget development policy states that annual budgets are based on clearly defined annual priorities, it is important for administrative staff to enhance current efforts to distribute information regarding budget development and mid-year progress. Faculty and staff organizations should also make a more concerted effort to inform their constituencies about the key elements of the budget to ensure that all stakeholders have access to information.

Budget cuts during the recent downturn were made in a strategic fashion with minimal “across the board” actions. This practice requires more buy-in from campus stakeholders, but provides sustainable cost savings that will facilitate long-term planning.

The College’s debt is very low with no plans to take on additional debt. Current debt was issued for infrastructure projects and is held in Certificates of Participation that will be paid off in 2013.

### **Adequacy of Financial Resources**

The institution’s operating budget has remained relatively flat for the past five years. As state appropriations have declined, tuition and fees have been used to make up the balance.

There are adequate resources to operate programs and transfers are allowed though specific guidelines set by the state. However, the college maintains a limited reserve balance of \$300,000, which has been required by the Board of Trustees since 1999. This appears to be less than 1.5% of E&G revenue and limits flexibility in the event of an emergency or unexpected revenue shortfall. Actual reserves exceed \$300,000. The administration will bring forward a new policy this fall to define an appropriate level of reserve funding.

Auxiliary services comprise the bookstore and dining services. The total auxiliary enterprise operates as an independent agency and carries a positive fund balance as a whole. The college subsidizes dining services at a reasonable level. The college operates in an area that has many reasonably priced restaurants within walking distance. This, coupled with a small client base and the increased cost of benefits-eligible staff, results in an operation that will likely continue to operate at a loss. The institution should closely monitor dining services operations to ensure that deficits are kept to a minimum.

## **Financial Management**

Lower Columbia College has a reputation for being a financially well-managed organization and the review team found no evidence to the contrary. The accounting function within the college is operated under generally accepted principles, duties are appropriately divided and controls are in place to ensure integrity. College funds, regardless of source, flow through the accounting team. The finance team is proactive in providing assistance to institutional sub-units to ensure that cash collected at events is properly receipted and deposited in a timely fashion. Staff indicated that they monitor the campus calendar to look for events that may involve handling of cash. This proactive stance protects both the college and those involved in collecting funds.

Accounting staff and the Vice President for Administration report regularly to the Board of Trustees, providing budget updates including fund balances. Annual financial reports are part of the state-wide system audit – Lower Columbia College has not had a finding in its financial audits since 1999. While college accounting staff display competence and dedication, it is clear that they are working with outdated financial computing systems. The antiquated accounting system used by Washington’s community colleges is difficult to manage, is not user-friendly and appears to be unable to complete even basic reports in a usable fashion. The lack of functionality leads to processes that take multiple times longer to complete than would be found in a modern accounting system. Reports lack clarity and require manipulation that take significant staff time.

**Standard 7.C** requires that “**the financial organization and management, as well as the system of reporting, ensure the integrity of institutional finances, create appropriate control mechanisms, and provide a basis for sound financial decision making.**” It is somewhat remarkable that the system works as well as it does – this appears largely to be through the dedication of staff and collaboration with other schools in the state. Even so, the amount of energy expended in using the system could be better allocated in other areas that would facilitate more timely and accurate reporting. The Team is concerned that the system lacks long term viability and that, even in the short term, deprives the college of critical decision making tools required for data-driven decision making.

## **Fundraising and Development**

The Lower Columbia College Foundation is an independently organized 501(C)(3) organization dedicated to the promotion of Lower Columbia College with a focus on career and technical education. Endowment accounts are managed by Foundation staff under the supervision of the



Foundation Board. Two Lower Columbia College Board members and the Lower Columbia College President serve as ex-officio members of the Foundation Board.

The Foundation's investment portfolio has only partially rebounded from the recent recession. Foundation staff have prudently postponed expenditures for endowments that have lost principal from the original investment. Management also recently moved funds into a more stable investment instrument in an effort to restore stability. The College has done well in fundraising, receiving recent major gifts in the amount of \$1,000,000 and \$3,500,000 to support the Rose Center for the Arts and the college's music program.

## **Summary**

Lower Columbia College's financial management appears to be strong. Budget documents provide stakeholders with an opportunity to participate in the planning process. Use of debt is extremely low and confined to projects that have identifiable funding streams. State support remains solid, providing approximately two-thirds of the budget. The college must make additional cuts due to fluctuations in the budget that might be softened if there was a more sufficient balance of reserve funds. Auxiliaries perform well and seem to be well managed. Although serious concern abounds in regard to the financial management system, the organization managing finances is capable and dedicated. Reports are submitted in a timely fashion, Trustees receive regular updates and the state rarely finds fault with the college's submissions.

## **STANDARD EIGHT – Physical Resources**

### **Instructional and Support Facilities**

Grounds on the main campus of Lower Columbia College are well kept and buildings are well maintained. Buildings are refurbished as funds allow, but even older buildings are maintained in a fashion that promotes an academic environment. Many classrooms are being converted to "smart" classrooms with projectors, multiple media inputs and computers. Although many buildings are more than 30 years old it is clear that the institution has made a commitment to implementing technology to improve student learning.

With the exception of the gymnasium, ADA access is good for academic buildings and classrooms. The lack of ADA access to the gymnasium is a concern that should be closely monitored by the institution. Access to the college's fitness room is located on the second floor of the gymnasium with no elevator or lift for disabled students or staff. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges noted that this is a situation that must be addressed:

**Although at the time of the construction of the gymnasium accessibility standards did not exist, current standards require all programs, activities and services to be available**

**to all students, including students with disabilities. Therefore *the college must either modify the existing facilities or provide alternate and comparable facilities for students with disabilities.* (Exhibit 8.9: Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Civil Rights Compliance Review; October, 2009, p. 17. Emphasis added.)**

Current practice is to offer memberships to off-campus providers (such as the YMCA) for students seeking access to the room. This seems to be a less than ideal solution that places disabled students at a disadvantage in relation to their peers. The college is planning to expand the gymnasium and relocate the exercise facility. However, this plan is still in the design stage, denying disabled students access to a service that is available to others on campus.

The team noted a concern about the arrangement of the student services area. It appeared to the Committee that the physical arrangement of the area contributes to frustration among students in regard to long lines and a lack of privacy for financial aid discussions.

There are multiple areas for students and faculty to work in a modern environment, including the Learning Commons located in the Library. The Learning Commons is clearly a valued location for students to gather for research, collaboration and group projects.

## **Equipment and Materials**

Laboratories are in good working order and regular inspections of key equipment (gas lines, fume hoods, etc.) ensure that students have a safe working environment. The team did notice that venting equipment was in place in the automotive lab, but that the vent hoses were not attached to at least one vehicle with a running engine.

## **Physical Resource Planning**

The college completed a comprehensive master plan update in 2008 and shows evidence of working toward that plan. The college anticipates it will obtain state funding for the new Health and Sciences facility in the next biennium. Planning is underway to determine how to best allocate space in the new building and for how to reallocate space vacated on campus by those moving into the new facility.

One area under consideration is the move of administration to the core of campus. Team members heard references to administration being located “across the street” on several occasions. The peripheral location of administrative offices appears to provide a perceptual barrier to those on campus. The team feels confident that the administration is open and accessible, but it appears that a more central location would enhance the visibility of campus leadership in a positive way.

## **Summary**

The grounds on campus are in excellent condition. A review of the work order process in conjunction with formal and informal campus tours indicate that the college understands the importance of preventative maintenance as the best means to saving money in the long run. In spite of a significant number of buildings that are forty to fifty years old, buildings are in well maintained,

have been upgraded to accommodate technology, remodeled as appropriate and most have received ADA upgrades. The addition of a new fitness center should address the issue of access to the current weight room.

## **STANDARD NINE – Institutional Integrity**

The Committee found that Lower Columbia College has made a consistent effort to design and implement a transparent system of institutional assessment and planning. The process, which includes regular analysis of data for informed decision making ensures institutional integrity. Integrity is addressed in every aspect of assessment. It is a core value of the institution. **“Our campus community expects an environment of integrity, respect, collaboration, cooperation, inclusion, and innovation that fosters personal growth, academic excellence, and accountability.”**

Lower Columbia College is committed to upholding the highest ethical standards in its relationship with students, employees, and the public. High standards are expected of Board members, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Prior to employment, college values are shared with each prospective faculty, staff, and administrator in a personal interview with the President. Values are posted in visible locations in each campus building and published in the LCC Catalog, Faculty and Student Handbooks.

Ethical guidelines for College employees are outlined in the Administrative Policy Manual, the Code of Ethics, and specific college policies. All of the documents were available to evaluators on site. College policies, while accurate, lack some necessary clarity. The College is encouraged to review and update those policies. Perhaps a faculty driven update of the policies will provide clarity in the role faculty play in decision making.

The institution represents itself accurately and consistently to its public constituencies and prospective students in public documents. It defines and prohibits conflict of interest and demonstrates, through its policies and practices, its commitment to the free pursuit of and dissemination of knowledge consistent with the college’s mission and goals.

The Committee found multiple communication methods utilized by college personnel, although a perception exists that the analysis used in decision making is not widely known throughout the college community. Perhaps the creation and utilization of a college intranet site could enhance and standardize communication. This was not a question of integrity, but rather one of how to best market and deliver college information to the internal constituents.

The Self-Study also identified the need to attract and retain students and employees from underrepresented groups. The identified solution was the establishment of a campus-wide Diversity Committee to promote student and employee participation rates, and to encourage collaborative efforts between instruction and student activities to enhance achievement of multiculturalism learning outcomes.

All supporting documentation for Standard Nine was available and accurately organized for the Evaluation Committee. Interviews with members of the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, and administrators supported and complemented the integrity of the institution.

## General Commendations and Recommendations

### Commendations

1. The Committee commends the College staff, faculty, and administration for their strong commitment to student success. Exceptional demonstrations of quality service, teaching excellence, and collaboration are evident at Lower Columbia College. As the College budget has been reduced, student enrollment and employee workloads have increased. Employees exhibit exceptional support for one another, the communities they serve, and the College Mission.
2. The Committee commends the College for implementing a Learning Commons model that has made the library the biggest classroom on campus—integrating resources for students and faculty to ensure educational success. It is a visible symbol of creativity and innovation.
3. The Committee commends the College Leadership and the Board of Trustees for strong advocacy, support, and oversight of Lower Columbia College.
4. The Committee commends the College for its active commitment to student access and success through its exemplary services, experiences, and opportunities. This was especially evident in the energy and attention given to the collaboration between lower Columbia College and its area high schools. Noteworthy examples were the carefully designed and administered Running Start Program, dual advisory committees in career and technical education, and creative high school diploma completion efforts.
5. The Committee commends the College for its outstanding efforts in response to community needs that have changed due to the economy. Lower Columbia College faculty and staff have been responsive in serving a significant increase in students who have been negatively impacted by the recession. Working closely with community partners and employers, specialized programs have been created, and existing programs have been redesigned to serve the needs of dislocated workers, TANF recipients, incumbent workers, employers and entrepreneurs. Clearly, the College understands its mission of “**improving the quality of life in our community.**”

### Recommendations

1. 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 increased the staffing to accommodate the additional demands. **(Standards 3.A.4, 3.B.6)**

2. 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)**
3. 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)**
4. The Committee recommends the College assess the effectiveness of its internal policies and procedures. A review and update of college policies and procedures may ensure that the authority, responsibilities, and relationship among and between the administration, faculty, staff, and students are clearly defined. Clarity in the role of the faculty in governance, planning, budget, and policy development needs to be clear and public. All constituents may participate in the planning and evaluation process, and results will influence resource allocation, program improvement, and evidence of institutional effectiveness. **(Standards 6.A.1, 6.A.2, 6.A.3, 6.D)**
5. The Committee recommends the College maintain adequate financial reserves to meet fluctuations in operating revenue, expenses, and debt service. Lower Columbia College should develop a clear policy on reserve balances. The policy should clearly state the goal for reserve balance amounts, and outline appropriate use of said funds. **(Standard 7.B.7)**
6. The Committee recommends the College construct and maintain facilities with regard for health, safety, and access by the physically disabled. Disabled students should be able to access all areas of campus. While the institution has clear plans to move the fitness center from an upstairs location in the gymnasium to an accessible area, the earliest this could happen is 2013. In the meantime, the institution should provide access to the fitness center. This could be accomplished with a stair lift, new elevator, or the relocation of the center. **(Standard 8.A.5)**