

# Mid-Cycle Evaluation

Wenatchee Valley College

Wenatchee, Washington

May 2-3, 2022

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

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## Evaluators

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Dr. Janette Isaacson, Oregon Institute of Technology

Dr. Ron Larsen, NWCCU Liaison

## Introduction

The remote evaluation team for the Mid-Cycle evaluation included Dr. Lori Stinson, professor of nursing at Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho, and Dr. Janette Isaacson, chair of the Executive Commission on Assessment, online learning, and associate professor at Oregon Institute of Technology, in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Dr. Ron Larsen, senior vice president, served as the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities liaison.

On May 2-3, 2022, Dr. Stinson and Dr. Isaacson conducted a virtual Mid-Cycle Evaluation with the administration and faculty of Wenatchee Valley College, which was founded as a private college in 1939, transitioning to a public institution in 1967. Located in Wenatchee, Washington, the college serves a large, three county region. The satellite campus in Omak, Washington, approximately 100 miles from the main campus, was established in 1975, primarily to serve the educational needs of the county, and of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. The college serves nearly 5,000 students (2,774 FTE), and is designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution, with 42% of its students identifying as Latinx. The college offers programs in health & human services, liberal arts, business, STEM, and the skilled trades, in addition to transfer degrees. Three (3) bachelor degrees are offered, one in nursing, and two applied science offerings.

Due to continuing travel restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, meetings with various campus stakeholders were held via Zoom, including with the president, the vice presidents for student services and for instruction, the instructional deans, the executive director of institutional effectiveness and planning, who also serves as the college's accreditation liaison officer, the instruction council, the curriculum committee and the core theme committees. Individuals connected to the meetings through their own devices, ensuring the evaluators could ask candid questions and receive direct responses.

Ty Jones, executive director of institutional effectiveness and planning and accreditation liaison officer, served as the primary contact for the evaluation visit. Mr. Jones provided the team with numerous documents prior to and during the visit. He was timely in responding to requests, and was helpful in setting the visit schedule.

In addition to the documentation provided by Wenatchee Valley College, the evaluation team had the opportunity to review two ad hoc reports, one each from October of 2020 and 2021. These provided context for the work engaged by the college since the 2019 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness visit.

All meetings were productive and informative. The initial meetings with the president and vice presidents for student services and for instruction, allowed the evaluation team to get a sense of their support of the college mission, core themes, and assessment of student achievement.

The meeting with the director of institutional effectiveness and planning illuminated the college's endeavors to establish a meaningful system of assessment, and to disaggregate and publish key data. The virtual visit allowed the team to gather evidence regarding the college's assessment framework and efforts, and the fit of assessment with mission fulfillment and overall institutional strategic planning.

## Part I: Mission Fulfillment

Wenatchee Valley College's mission statement is clearly visible on its website and in other publications. Recently, the college amended the mission to include language focused on diversity, equity and inclusion, as noted here (underlined language added in 2021):

*Wenatchee Valley College enriches North Central Washington by serving educational and cultural needs of communities and residents throughout the service area. The college is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students and employees and provides high-quality transfer, liberal arts, professional/technical, basic skills and continuing education for students of diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds.*

The mission statement clearly describes the college's commitment to offering a broad range of educational opportunities in its service region. The mission is supported by the four core themes of educational achievement, support for learning, responsiveness to local needs, and diversity and cultural enrichment. Each core theme has a unique set of indicators and an expected level of performance, for a total of 32 indicators. The core themes are inclusive of student learning and achievement, and support services. Achievement of the mission is predicated on successful attainment of each core theme, with results displayed in a color-coded scorecard. The scorecard is reviewed and approved annually by the board of trustees, thus affirming fulfillment of the mission. Further, the core themes are tightly tied to the college's strategic plan.

To support the core themes and associated pieces of the strategic plan, each is overseen by a committee comprised of faculty and staff. Following the 2019 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness, each committee proposed new indicators. The COVID-19 challenges prolonged this process; however, an updated slate of indicators was approved in 2021. Committee members report that actions and decisions are data driven, based on data provided by institutional effectiveness, by external sources, or generated by the committee. In providing examples to the team, the *responsiveness to local needs* group described its recent focus on the Omak, Washington, campus through targeted advertising such as billboards and videos. Another initiative was procurement of a translation service to create Spanish-English language documents, in support of the college's Latinx students and Hispanic Serving designation. The *diversity and cultural enrichment* team was successful in instituting a diversity requirement for graduation and in creating a bias incident response team, including a bias reporting statement to be included in all course syllabi. The president shared that the college created a tribal liaison

position which reports directly to his office. The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation created a similar position, thus assuring ongoing and effective communication between the two entities, in support of students on the Omak campus. A gap identified by several campus personnel is the limited number of faculty of color, which the college has taken initial steps to rectify. Finally, the *support for learning* core theme committee, together with student services and facilities, reallocated resources to create a dedicated test proctoring space, to meet the needs of students requiring accommodations. Through regular review of the core theme scorecard and with input of the core theme committees, the college demonstrates an ongoing process to assess institution-level effectiveness.

*Compliment: Core themes are tightly tied to the strategic plan; the core theme committees take very seriously their responsibility in fulfilling the institution's mission and strategic plan.*

## Part II: Student Achievement

Since the 2019 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness, WVC has amplified its efforts to assess student achievement through development of learning outcomes at all levels, in both instructional and non-instructional programs. Across instructional programs, faculty take accountability for academic rigor and alignment of learning outcomes with industry need. For example, the professional-technical programs have advisory boards, which examine learning outcomes and activities, and assist programs to graduate students prepared to enter the workforce. Further, the annual academic planning process guides the work of the instruction team in its allocation of resources.

WVC has a robust set of institutional student learning outcomes (SLOs), which include problem solving [critical thinking, creative thinking, qualitative research, qualitative reasoning], communication [oral expression, written expression, artistic expression], social interaction [collaboration, ethical conduct, professional conduct, cultural diversity], and inquiry [information literacy, research, documentation]. These institutional outcomes are listed in the new master syllabus template, and in the area plan template. The mid-cycle report states that the college assesses one SLO each year. Now that all have been assessed, the next step is to review the four years of data and determine next steps.

*Compliment: The master syllabus template serves to connect what faculty are doing in the classroom with what the institution is trying to accomplish through its SLOs.*

WVC programs provide student mastery of content with appropriate breadth and depth. Review of course syllabi and the college catalog, indicate robust sequencing and synthesis of learning, demonstrating opportunity for student success throughout the various programs.

In terms of student achievement indicators and data, WVC is measuring retention, persistence, graduation rate, and its institutional student learning outcomes. As examples, a sample of

*equity* reports was provided to the evaluation team. In several reports, enrollment data are reported by three ethnic groups: White, Latinx, and All other. The report for another program showed similar data points, along with completions by ethnicity, and student age at enrollment. Yet another report included *ethnicity headcounts* which included Asian/ Pacific Islander, African American, Native American, Hispanic, Mixed/ Other, and White, and data were disaggregated by male/ female gender. In several instances, Pell eligibility and first generation data were provided, though not disaggregated by ethnicity or gender. Some disaggregated data is found on the WVC website; however, some of the data is not current, due in part, to the pandemic.

The college articulated a commitment to implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in student achievement and equity. In the mid-cycle report, pressing equity gaps in student success were identified as completion of college-level math in year one, fall to fall retention, and post-college transfer rate. For each of these indicators a gap percentage was noted, but comparators were not provided. The college also reported on a relatively small three-year graduation gap for students of color relative to white students (37% and 41% respectively), and a three-year graduation for Pell recipients of 32%, without comparators provided. As additional student achievement indicators, the college states that 31% of Latinx students are earning certificates compared to 18% of white students, and 66% of Latinx earn their credential with a transfer degree compared to white students at 75%.

In addition to these data, the college described changes to admission criteria for the nursing program to increase enrollment diversity, the creation of a math center where students may access tutoring, and a new student orientation focused on building community through affinity groups. These data and improvement examples support the college's emerging efforts to identify and address equity gaps, and to compare with regional and national peers on student achievement indicators. Further, the college may be able to leverage faculty interest in qualitative assessment practices to better understand and assess equity gaps.

*Compliment: WVC has a creative and innovative diversity and inclusion focus. WVC has a commitment to identify and improve equity gaps. Everyone at WVC is very proud of their Hispanic and Native American student population.*

*Concern: WVC is emerging in its efforts to compare itself to national peers. Additional time is needed to fully collect, analyze, and implement quality improvements based on comparator data (Standard 1.D.2, Standard 1.D.3).*

Faculty reported that program level, disaggregated data is not readily available or presented in an easily understood format. Faculty expressed interest in having access to robust, program level disaggregated data to better identify and address equity and achievement gaps. Institutional effectiveness reports providing these data through *ad hoc* requests made by programs or assessment coordinators. All parties concurred that additional resources in support of generating, publishing, and interpreting disaggregated data at the institutional and program levels, will be beneficial to mission fulfillment and ongoing assessment efforts.

*Concern: WVC has substantial plans in place for identifying and closing equity gaps and needs more time to fully implement them across all programs (Standard 1.D.2, Standard 1.D.4).*

*Concern: Although the College has established a system to collect, analyze, and share disaggregated data, data elements are still being collected, and additional time is needed to fully complete a cycle of assessment and planning, to appropriately deploy resources to close equity gaps (Standard 1.D.4).*

### Part III: Programmatic Assessment

The college did not include in its Mid-Cycle Report, two examples of programmatic assessment to demonstrate a continuous process of improvement. Instead, the report contains an analysis of area plans for three academic years. The number of plans containing data has increased from 24 (66%) in AY2019-2020 to 42 (90%) in AY2021-2022. Further, the college notes that units have moved away from exclusive use of completion, retention, enrollment, and demographic data, to learning-focused measures and data, as demonstrated by six units identifying learning outcomes in 2019-2020, and 33 with such outcomes in the current year.

To support programmatic and departmental assessment efforts, the college invested in four (4) assessment coordinators, faculty with 1/3 stipend leave, to serve as peer supporters of the process. The work of the assessment coordinators is highly valued by administration and peer faculty. The evaluation team heard numerous examples of how the coordinators contributed to faculty buy-in for ongoing assessment. In addition to one-on-one work with faculty and programs, the assessment coordinators created a Canvas page that contains many assessment-focused resources, and where exemplars are posted.

*Compliment: The assessment coordinators are highly valued at all levels of the organization, and have greatly contributed to faculty buy-in to the assessment process, through peer-to-peer engagement.*

*Compliment: The Canvas site where assessment materials and exemplars are posted, is a valued resource for faculty.*

The program of assessment at the college is built on annual area plans for each instructional and non-instructional unit. The area plans are to align with the college mission, and with the strategic plan, which is built in part, on the four core themes. The area plans have evolved over time. Early on, the focus was on procurement of resources. In 2018, when a common structure was adopted, the focus shifted to looking at department or program gains, gaps, and goals for a given year, in alignment with the institutional student learning outcomes and core themes. More recently, the coordinators recommended a three-year cycle whereby an assessment question is posed in the first year, data are gathered in the second year, and in year three, analysis and implementation of actions occurs. Once phase 3 for a particular question has been completed, the unit identifies a new question, and the cycle repeats. Though this is the



preferred cycle, it is acknowledged that some programs take longer than the three-year timeframe to complete its assessment, where others complete all three phases in one year.

In reviewing a sample of area plans, the evaluation team noted inconsistent use of the template. All plans identified gains, gaps, and goals for the year, leading the team to conclude that this piece of the area plan is well established. Less consistency was noted in assessment questions, use of data to answer the questions, or application of the data for program improvement. Some programs mapped the assessment questions to program learning outcomes, others to student learning outcomes. Campus personnel confirmed that the development and integration of program learning outcomes into the area plans and the system of assessment is an emerging effort, and some programs are in the developmental stage of identifying meaningful program learning outcomes. However, most programs have learning outcomes posted to the catalog or the website. The college is emerging in its efforts for area plans to consistently include program learning outcomes and indicators of program improvement, and to support gains, gaps, and goals with data. Campus stakeholders report that area plans have become more data-centric, and faculty demonstrate curiosity about assessment questions and a genuine desire to find answers to the assessment questions. A change in the way data are disaggregated and displayed is reported to have increased faculty understanding of the data, though data continue to be difficult to access without submitting a specialized request to institutional effectiveness.

Area plans and assessment resources are housed in the college's online learning management system, affording access to all campus personnel and to the evaluation committee. Through the area plans, the college collects vignettes, which "provide a detailed and specific glimpse into the assessment work being done" in a particular program or unit. Prior to the visit, the evaluation team was provided with access to this repository and the numerous documents describing and supporting the college's assessment process, including tools for developing objectives and creating vignettes, and information on developing benchmarks.

In reviewing the area plans and support materials, the evaluation team noted a number of programs have documented curriculum mapping of the institutional student learning outcomes to the program and course learning outcomes. For example, the non-instructional unit of counseling has stated student learning outcomes in a separate document from the area plan. In reviewing the area plan for AY2021-2022, it is noted that each area (gains, gaps, and goals) is tied to specific core themes and student learning outcomes. The counseling center does not identify a phase 1 program learning outcome for the year, but describes the development of an assessment tool to measure effectiveness of services. In phase 2, counseling reflects on the survey responses and data, noting the sample size was quite small. In phase 3, the department describes its plans to review the survey to better reflect the "services provided to students, the quality of services, and student identifiers". Also, the need for a data tracking tool has been identified, so the unit can be more responsive in meeting campus needs.

The Humanities department has a well-developed set of program and course learning outcomes that are tied to the institutional student learning outcomes. In the current year area plan, creating an end-of-course reflective writing assignment is identified as the phase 1 goal, and is clearly tied to the program learning outcome of ‘demonstrate reflective and metacognitive thinking about the humanities.’ The supporting narrative describes the value of reflective writing, including specific writing prompts. The department describes the results of implementing an end-of-course reflection, noting that 82 of 92 students completed the assignment. Excerpts from papers are included to illuminate student learning. In phase 3, faculty reflect on what they learned from implementation of this strategy, noting, *reflective writing from students also demonstrates a value added to the students’ experience in the course*. Further, faculty reflection demonstrates a future plan of refining writing prompts to encourage students to describe specific instances when course knowledge was applied outside of the classroom. Finally, the faculty believe use of reflective writing and other course assignments will help facilitate development of benchmarks for program learning outcomes.

The current area plan for industrial technology, which includes welding, electronics, and engineering, also aligns gains, gaps, and goals to core themes and student learning outcomes. The phase 1 goal or student learning outcome listed from 2018-2019 is, *demonstrate industry entry-level knowledge and skills for control devices and robotic cells for industrial facilities*. Updates on achieving the student learning outcome are noted for 2019-2021, and for 2021-2022, including administration of a survey and of major classroom projects.

The bachelor’s level registered nurse to bachelor degree program maps its gains to core themes and student learning outcomes, specifically S4L. For its phase 1 goal, program learning outcome *problem solving – critical thinking NURS 490* is identified. The accompanying narrative describes the requirement for students to reflect on *student learning outcomes* and how they were met during the course. For phase 2, it was noted that reflection and portfolio assignments are excellent methods for capturing individual student learning. However, no data are noted and there is no phase 3 documented, though perhaps it is coming over the next years, as supported by the three-year assessment cycle. Additional examples were provided during the virtual meetings.

As noted, area plans are crafted by department faculty with assistance from the assessment coordinators, and are reviewed by deans or directors, who are charged to assist with implementation of the plans. The deans or directors attach budget requests to the plans, and present them to their supervisory cabinet member. President’s cabinet allocates resources based on the area plans and the accompanying budget requests. The college identifies this process as a ‘bottom-up’ process for allocation of institutional resources. Campus personnel acknowledge that fiscal resources are very limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacts, including a significant drop in student enrollment. Faculty provided examples of very low cost or no cost activities they have engaged based on assessment findings, such as peer mentors, while administrators described their efforts to internally reallocate resources when creative

ideas emerge. In one case, assessment findings were leveraged to obtain a grant to support additional counseling services.

*Concern: WVC has substantial plans in place for systematic, regular, assessment at all levels (institutional, program, course) and needs more time to fully implement them across all instructional and noninstructional units (Standard 1.C.5, Standard 1.C.7).*

#### PART IV: Moving Forward

Since 2019, the college has made strides in developing a system of program assessment, based on area plans and assessment questions. It has also firmly established a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, as noted in its updated mission statement. As the college prepares for the next Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness report and visit, there is an opportunity to harness the expertise of the assessment coordinators and the enthusiasm of faculty, to refine and engage a systematic process of program assessment. Implementation of a timely and holistic program of assessment will lead to continuous improvement and support the college's efforts to identify and close the loop in equity and student achievement gaps.

#### PART V: Addendums (Where Applicable)

Not Applicable