

**COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION REPORT
FOR
INTERIM CANDIDACY**

**College of Western Idaho
Boise, Idaho**

October 5 - 7, 2011

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

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Introduction

Opened in January 2009, College of Western Idaho (CWI) is the newest community college in Idaho. Today, CWI enrolls over 8,000 students in credit programs, over 3,000 in Adult Basic Education (ABE), and as many as 10,000 (duplicated) in non-credit community education and workforce development offerings. While part of that growth is the result of a 2009 acquisition of Boise State University's professional-technical and basic skills units, the remainder is largely attributable to rapid expansion of transfer general education courses.

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) accepted College of Western Idaho's Application for Consideration for Candidacy in January 2010. The October 5-7, 2011, on-site visit was the institution's first. While the bulk of the interviews and meetings were held at CWI's Aspen Creek campus, the evaluators also spent time at the college's Ada County, Nampa, Boise State University, Oak Park Center, and Canyon County sites. Faculty, staff, and students from other, smaller sites were invited to join forums at the Ada County and Nampa campuses. A complete list of interviewees is included at the end of this report.

Throughout the visit, the evaluators found CWI staff and faculty to be exceptionally welcoming, forthcoming, and generous with their time. The evaluators wish to thank and commend the visit's organizers.

Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The 111-page *Self-Evaluation Report* was delivered electronically and in hard-copy in late-August, well in advance of the visit. In addition to the self-evaluation document, the evaluators

received a current college catalog and course schedule, along with a substantial set of appendices and exhibits in both hard-copy and electronic form.

The self-evaluation narrative was clear and readable, with the text organized standard-by-standard. Helpfully, the report included occasional summary lists of institutionally-identified strengths and weaknesses. Despite the report's positive qualities, the evaluators expressed some desire for greater depth and detail in some sections of the report. A notable example is the discussion of core themes, which was comparatively superficial in its explanation of the rationale for CWI's benchmarks and in its analysis of assessment results.

Topics Addressed as Addenda to the Self-Evaluation Report

As the current evaluation was CWI's first, no prior recommendations were to be addressed.

Eligibility Requirements

The evaluation committee paid careful attention to the assessment of College of Western Idaho's ability to meet the Eligibility Requirements of NWCCU. In the majority of cases, the evaluators were convinced that CWI was in fact meeting those requirements at the time of the visit. In a handful of areas, however, the evaluation committee noted significant room for additional progress in Eligibility Requirement compliance. These are noted in the body of this report and are reflected, in particular, in the General Recommendations that conclude the report's narrative.

Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

Standard 1A — Mission

College of Western Idaho's mission statement was adopted by its trustees December 15, 2009. Though general in its language, the mission articulates a purpose appropriate to that of a comprehensive community college. The mission statement is widely disseminated in college publications and is generally understood by the college's community.

CWI's inaugural core themes reflect traditional mission areas of comprehensive community colleges — Professional-Technical Education, General Education, Basic Skills Education, and Community Outreach. As such the core themes provide greater specificity to the institutional mission, defining CWI's purpose, characteristics, and expectations. Though other planning documents and goals are helping to guide CWI's early development, the college generally articulates its accomplishments within the framework of its mission.

Standard 1B — Core Themes

College of Western Idaho has established objectives for each of its core themes and has identified preliminary indicators of achievement for evaluating accomplishment of those objectives. The alignment between the CWI's core themes and its institutional priorities, however, was a matter of some concern for the current evaluation committee. In particular, the

Basic Skills Education and Community Outreach core themes appeared less clear in their organizational integration, resource priority, and institutional role than their counterpart themes. Likewise, the quality and usefulness of CWI's initial core theme objectives and indicators are somewhat mixed. At the time of the visit, the evaluation committee found that a number of indicators were without data, that some objectives appeared difficult to measure, and that benchmarks often lacked a clear rationale or were in flux. To their credit, college officials acknowledged as much. The college's *Self-Evaluation Report*, other institutional documents, and on-site interviews during the visit collectively suggest room for improvement in CWI's core themes, objectives, and indicators.

Resources and Capacity

Standard 2.A — Governance

Unsurprisingly, the College of Western Idaho's system of governance, though functional, remains somewhat a work in progress. At the higher reaches of administration, people's authority, roles, and responsibilities are clearly defined through organizational charts and position descriptions that are appropriate, seemingly serviceable, and reasonably transparent.

Given the institution's rapid rate of evolution, however, it's no surprise that the particulars of its governance structures remain in flux to some degree. The visiting evaluators encountered a number of examples of administrative reassignments, reorganizations, and process changes that reflect CWI's newness, its rapid expansion, and its shifting day-to-day priorities. The document *Making Decisions 2010*, which attempts to provide an operational and governance blueprint for CWI, was undergoing revision at the time of the current evaluation, with a working title of *Making Decisions 2012*. Currently, CWI's constituent-representative bodies include a Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, and College Council. The leaders of these groups appeared very engaged in their roles and universally acknowledged that their roles were maturing — a positive sign, given CWI's executive-level interest in developing a more participatory decision-making process, but nonetheless a sign of work yet to do.

To some degree, CWI's governance challenges were exacerbated, early on, by the acquisition of programs from Boise State University, where different cultures and processes were the norm. During the current visit, faculty and staff at CWI generally expressed confidence that communications and alignment among constituent groups is improving. The college trustees and administration at many levels are taking a variety of steps — including the expansion of communications avenues, the use of employee surveys, increasing clarification of governance roles, and deliberate person-to-person outreach — to sustain that positive momentum.

It is abundantly clear that College of Western Idaho takes seriously its commitment to achieve and maintain full compliance with the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. That goal is considered carefully in a wide range of college governance, operational, and planning contexts.

Governing Board

In keeping with Idaho statute, the College of Western Idaho's five-member board of trustees is

elected at large by the voters of Ada and Canyon counties. The current board members, many of whom have played a direct role in the college's initial formation, demonstrate an unusually deep loyalty to the institution. Their steadfast commitment to the start-up of a new institution — a process with considerable challenges and, from time to time, contention — is laudable.

A comprehensive set of local policies defines board authority and process, ensuring, among other things, that board members have no contractual, employment, or financial interest in the institution and that the board communicates and acts only as a committee of the whole.

As a relatively new board, CWI's trustees have spent a considerable amount of time and effort in establishing that initial set of institutional policies. These policies are widely available on CWI's campus. In many cases, they form the foundation for more specific administrative procedures. In the majority of board policies, authority for implementation is appropriately and explicitly delegated to the president. However, because the founding board was largely obliged to build the institution without an existing structure in place, some policies — such as administrative hiring — continue to call for board action where delegation is more typical. As the college matures, the trustees are developing a more nuanced view of their role as institutional guides.

After conducting national search, the board selected the current president in 2009. In their meeting with the evaluators, board members expressed considerable confidence in their appointee. Board policy provides for a systematic annual review of the president's performance, facilitated by the board chair. In on-site interviews, the trustees reported that they take this process seriously, citing specific examples of constructive outcomes from the discussion.

Local policy similarly provides for an annual self-evaluation of the board itself. The trustees reported that they had completed this process on a regular basis. In discussion on-site, they stressed the positive working relationships among the trustees themselves, noting that the members interact constructively even when they disagree. Because the trustees have worked closely together on issues and enjoy a high degree of mutual trust, they indicated that their self-evaluations had so far yielded few surprises or new opportunities to improve board effectiveness. Going forward, the board's self-assessment and professional development might profitably be focused on the changing nature of their role in a larger, more established educational institution.

Leadership and Management

The College of Western Idaho's president is well qualified and highly experienced. He maintains full-time responsibility to the institution. Though CWI's organizational structures remain in development, the college has gradually acquired a sufficient number of qualified administrators to provide effective leadership and management for the institution's major support and operational functions. Administrative leaders work collaboratively across institutional areas. Their assignments are characterized by appropriate tasks and levels of responsibility.

Policies and Procedures

- *Academics:* College of Western Idaho's *Faculty Handbook* outlines a comprehensive set of academic policies — including standards of practice, workload and responsibilities,

and intellectual property rights — appropriate to a two-year institution. Revisions to the *Faculty Handbook* may be proposed by the Faculty Senate and are subject to approval by the college administration and trustees. Chapter Three of CWI's *Policy Manual* provides the board policies that underlie the handbook's provisions. These documents are readily available to faculty, staff, and administrators through CWI's intranet portal. As appropriate, academic policies are also communicated to students.

The draft CWI *Library Operating Manual* is evidence that the college has made progress toward documenting policies regarding access to and use of library and information resources. The evaluation committee urges the college and the Library Advisory Committee to continue the process of finalizing, publishing, and enforcing these policies.

The evaluators found CWI's transfer-of-credit policy to be clearly articulated and effectively communicated to students. Articulation and transfer agreements between institutions are clearly stated in CWI's catalog and Articulation Summary.

- *Students:* Clearly stated policies addressing students' rights and responsibilities are found in the college *Policy Manual*. A review of the college catalog, *Student Handbook* and college website confirmed that the procedures and parameters for academic honesty, appeals, grievances, and accommodations for persons with disabilities are clearly stated and readily available to students and staff. Interviews with students and staff indicated that these policies are administered in a fair and consistent manner.

A general policy regarding the college's open-door admissions is also found in the college *Policy Manual*. Admission and placement processes are clearly articulated in the college catalog and website. Guidelines for student continuation in and termination from educational programs, including an appeals and readmission process, are included. In interviews on-site, students and staff confirmed that these procedures are administered fairly and consistently.

Board Policy 6100 addresses the Associated Students Organization. No additional policies exist that address co-curricular activities. A review of the *Student Clubs and Organization Handbook* confirmed that clear guidelines for student clubs and organizations and the roles and responsibilities of students and the college are readily available for review. Current co-curricular activities are very limited. As a broader co-curricular program emerges, including student publications and other student media, policies and procedures will need to be developed.

- *Human Resources:* College policies and procedures regarding human resources have recently been drafted and approved, and are found in the college *Policy Manual*. A review of the *Employee Handbook* (adopted October 2011) and the *Faculty Handbook* (revision proposed 2011) confirmed that the procedures, though new, are clear and readily available to staff and faculty. In that the policies and procedures are recently drafted or under revision, the evaluators were unable to ascertain whether they are regularly reviewed and consistently applied to all employees.

Interviews with staff, faculty, and Human Resources Department employees indicated that through CWI's New Employee Information/Orientation Session all employees are apprised of their conditions of employment, work assignments, rights and responsibilities, and criteria and procedures for evaluation, retention, promotion, and termination. This information is also clearly documented in Human Resources procedures in CWI's *Policy Manual*, as well as in the *Employee Handbook* and *Faculty Handbook*.

Policy 5080 and Procedure 5081 in the college *Policy Manual* clearly define parameters of confidentiality and access to personnel files. Through personal observation, evaluators confirmed that the college maintains the security and appropriate confidentiality of human resources records.

- *Institutional Integrity*: The College of Western Idaho takes pains to ensure that its external communications are fair and accurate. A four-person Communications and Marketing Department is responsible for college-wide messaging. The office's well-qualified staff work collaboratively with all college units to provide communications guidelines, to review and approve official messages, and to monitor the quality and accuracy of announcements, statements, and publications.

The college's academic programs and services are communicated to students and to the public via both a print and on-line catalog, as well as other associated publications. The registrar retains final approval of catalog copy, which is updated regularly.

College of Western Idaho's commitment to ethical standards is expressed in a variety of policies and publications. Board Policy 2130 and 4020 set out a framework for the conduct of the trustees themselves and for the college's business activities. Employee conduct is guided by an exceptionally comprehensive set of guidelines, collected in Administrative Procedure 5101. The *Faculty Handbook's* Faculty Standards of Practice offer similar guidance with respect to instructional matters. Appropriate grievance procedures are provided to students and employees under Board Policy 6120 and 5140, respectively. Conflicts of interest are explicitly prohibited at the trustee level within Board Policy 2130, for faculty in the *Faculty Handbook's* Section 2.04, and for employees in Administrative Procedure 5101.

In describing its accreditation status, CWI's print catalog (p. 12), on-line catalog, and other official publications appropriately reference its sponsoring institution, College of Southern Idaho. No mention of CWI's accreditation, speculative or otherwise, is made.

College of Western Idaho's relationship to CSI is detailed in a comprehensive, yet concise five-page document that provides for the sharing of academic, enrollment, and financial services, as well as dispute resolution. Under CSI guidelines, CWI retains primary responsibility for legal compliance, human resource matters, and local grievances. Two brief addenda speak specifically to library services and financial aid.

Referencing applicable Idaho statute, Board Policy 4410 delegates to the president the authority to enter into additional contracts on behalf of CWI. To ensure adequate

controls, the college has developed a one-page Contract Reference Guide that defines both monetary and non-monetary contractual obligations, outlines the steps for processing contracts at CWI, and requires approval from the president or vice president of finance and administration (VPFA).

- *Academic Freedom:* Academic freedom is guaranteed by Board Policy 3070, which is repeated as Section 2.01 of the Faculty Handbook. The Student Handbook includes a Student Rights and Freedoms section that, reflecting Board Policy 6120 and 6130, provides similar protections for student expression and inquiry. The evaluators found CWI to be an institution that supports independent thought and responsible scholarship.
- *Finance:* Board policy delegates the oversight and management of College of Western Idaho's financial resources to the president and chief financial officer. The trustees approve the annual budget itself. The college has developed clear practices around financial planning, monitoring of budgets, reserves, investments, fundraising, cash management, debt management, and transfers and borrowings between funds.

Standard 2.B — Human Resources

Interviews with students, staff, and faculty indicated that College of Western Idaho personnel are competent, skillful, and qualified. A review of hiring documents confirmed that criteria, qualifications, and procedures for selection of personnel are clearly and publicly stated. Job descriptions accurately reflect the duties, responsibilities, and authority of each position. The *Self-Evaluation Report* notes that CWI benefits from its location amid greater Boise's highly educated workforce. On-site interviews and observations confirmed that impression.

However, while many employees expressed pride in their association with CWI, the evaluators also heard repeated concerns regarding the adequacy of staffing at the college. Many respondents questioned whether the staff's ability to provide quality support and operations functions has kept pace with enrollment growth. Consistent feedback indicated that service areas are overwhelmed, understaffed, and without sufficient training. Significant turnover of employees contributes to these challenges. In response, the college continues to hire new staff in many areas. A five-year operational plan calls for CWI to achieve an adequate staffing level through anticipated resources from increased tuition revenue.

In forums and interviews with staff, respondents confirmed that all continuing administrators and staff had undergone a performance evaluation within the past year. A random sampling of personnel files was consistent with that finding.

Policy 5210 and Procedure 5211 in the college *Policy Manual* document the CWI's commitment to faculty and staff professional development. Interviews with staff and faculty indicated that some opportunities for professional growth and development are available through the college's Center for Teaching and Learning. Faculty and staff are eligible for a discounted tuition for classes taken at the college. Financial support for outside professional development activities appeared to be limited, however.

Student interviews confirmed that College of Western Idaho's faculty are qualified and skilled instructors providing an excellent level of instruction. However, the current ratio of full time faculty to adjunct faculty is arguably insufficient to be sustainable, given CWI's goals. In forums and interviews with faculty, vocal concern was expressed pertaining to faculty workload. Faculty members described what they perceive as ever-increasing expectations for additional teaching load, advising responsibilities, and other duties.

Human Resources policies and procedures found in the college *Policy Manual* and in the *Faculty Handbook* clearly define the process, timelines, and criteria by which faculty are evaluated. Forums and individual interviews with faculty confirmed that all full-time faculty had undergone a performance evaluation within the past year. Instructors in general education areas confirmed that they participated in a comprehensive evaluation including input from department chair, observation of classroom teaching, and student evaluations. Interviews with professional-technical faculty, however, suggested less consistency and depth in the use of multiple indices to form a summary evaluation. Inconsistency in evaluation was also noted by some adjunct instructors. A random sampling of personnel files confirmed these impressions.

Concern: The committee recommends that the college implement evaluation of adjunct faculty throughout the college at least once every five-year period of service and that the evaluation consistently employs multiple indications of effectiveness.

Standard 2.C — Education Resources

College of Western Idaho (CWI) delivers college credit instruction, certificates, and degrees through its memorandum of understanding with the College of Southern Idaho (CSI). All CWI programs and degrees are consistent with the college's mission. Credits and credentials earned at CWI appear on CSI transcripts and, where appropriate, are transferable to four-year institutions, subject to the specific policies of those institutions. In addition to transfer curricula, CWI offers 29 professional technical education (PTE) programs, many with a long-established history at Boise State University prior to their transition to CWI. Eight PTE programs have specialized accreditation or certification, and two are in the process of seeking similar status.

CWI's offerings are adequately described on the college's web page and in its catalog, with degree and certificate requirements clearly listed in table form. These requirements reflect generally accepted learning outcomes, norms, or equivalencies in higher education. CWI follows a semester calendar, with a traditional expectation of two years of full-time study for an associate-level degree.

The college has defined learning outcomes for all courses, programs, certificates, and degrees, as well as expected student learning outcomes for courses, regardless of location or delivery. Learning outcomes for professional-technical education (PTE) programs are defined in program assessment documents and are shared with students in well-defined syllabi. Additionally, these programs identify program- and degree-level learning outcomes in their annual program assessment reports, which, however, are not yet widely published. Within general education, a "program" may be defined as the distribution area — communication, English, mathematics, science, and social science, for example — required to fulfill lower-division requirements for

transfer. General learning outcomes have been developed to reflect the integration of knowledge and skills needed by transfer students. General education defines course outcomes for each class, which can be found on course syllabi. Often, course outcomes are provided by the College of Southern Idaho; however, in some instances CSI has approved CWI's request to revise outcomes for a particular class. General education core outcomes are published in the 2011-12 catalog.

Despite CWI's many strengths in its assessment of student learning, improvements are possible. Some PTE program outcomes, for example, describe learning expectations in general terms or do not identify acceptable thresholds. Examples include trades programs that indicate students will "demonstrate entry-level technician skills" but do not define the skills. Another example is in the Registered Nursing program's "students will qualify to take the NCLEX-RN exam" outcome, which has no benchmark. In other cases, data for program assessments is missing or is inconsistent throughout the text of the program assessment documents. Challenges in the data sometimes reflect a lapse or change in processes as CWI has absorbed functions from BSU and CSI during the last three years. The college is aware of these gaps and is responding.

Faculty involvement in curriculum revision, design, and implementation is in a state of flux at present. Ownership for the design and approval of curriculum does reside with faculty, but currently with faculty at CWI's sponsoring institution, College of Southern Idaho. CWI, however, has moved forward to develop a local process for faculty-driven course and program approval. That process begins at the division level, moves to the division chairs for feedback from their respective departments, and ends with the CWI Curriculum Committee (CWICC) for a final recommendation. These recommendations proceed to CWI's vice president for instruction and student services, who at present forwards them to CSI. CWICC elects a chairperson from the committee at large and includes a cross-section of representatives from each instructional division and from Student Services, including a student.

There is mixed evidence that CWI faculty use course assignments to foster student competency in library skills. Instructional integration of library information services is described in greater detail in Standard 2.E — Library and Information Resources, below.

CWI awards credit for prior experiential learning of professional-technical students, as described in the *Self-Evaluation Report*. Based on a recommendation by a CWI faculty team, credits are approved by their counterparts at College of Southern Idaho. Student transcripts include a clear designator for these credits.

The College of Western Idaho recognizes and evaluates a student's transfer credit from other regionally-accredited colleges and universities following Idaho State Board of Education policy. Students transferring to CWI with an associate transfer degree are generally considered to have satisfied lower-division general education requirements, though specific degree requirements must still be met. CWI faculty and their CSI counterparts collaborate for transcript evaluation consistency by using a common set of equivalency guides for Idaho institutions. They use similar methods for evaluating credit on a course-by-course basis. Transfer guidelines are clearly published in the college catalog and on its website. A variety of 2-plus-2 agreements lay out what courses students need to graduate with a bachelor's degree.

Undergraduate Programs

College of Western Idaho's general education core reflects the Idaho State Board of Education's General Education Core Standards. Requirements for all transfer associate degree programs include a recognizable core of general education that represents an integration of basic knowledge, with substantive course work in communication, English, humanities, mathematics, science, and social science. Associate of arts degrees also require a health and wellness course or two physical activity courses. CWI's general education outcomes — locally called Degree Learning Outcomes (DLOs) — include critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, communication, information literacy, personal growth, and responsibility. Effective fall 2011, general education core objectives, as they apply to each course, appear on all general education syllabi. A review of a broad selection of syllabi found identifiable and assessable learning outcomes throughout.

Related instruction at CWI is provided through completion of general education course offerings, which are taught by general education faculty who are appropriately qualified in their disciplines. These requirements are clearly indicated in each of the program curricula, with the courses helping to fulfill degree outcomes for all professional-technical programs.

Continuing Education and Non-Credit Programs

In addition to its transfer and professional-technical programs, College of Western Idaho offers non-credit instruction through its community outreach and basic skills units.

Community outreach offerings currently include two sub-units — community education and business partnerships/workforce development. In both cases, students are provided access to these courses and programs at multiple locations.

Interviews with business partnerships/workforce development staff confirmed that assessment takes place as part of the health sciences, manufacturing, and community-based training (CBT) courses and programs. CWI faculty from these disciplines plan, evaluate, and use feedback from assessment to inform program changes. Certificates of achievement are issued to participants in these programs. Using separate systems, community education and the business partnerships/workforce development programs both maintain student records describing the number of courses taken and the nature of student learning experiences. Since data for business partnerships/workforce development is not provided in the college's Datatel enterprise system, a fully integrated tracking and assessment process for non-credit courses appears potentially problematic. The evaluators did not find evidence of progress toward development of Continuing Education Unit (CEU) guidelines and transcription processes, as claimed in the *Self Evaluation Report* (p. 44).

The basic skills education program, in turn, supports CWI's mission by providing the open-access and quality learning opportunities for the residents of its region who need to develop stronger basic skills, complete a GED, or prepare for transition to post-secondary education. Over 3,000 basic skills students are served by CWI at a wide variety of locations throughout the college service area.

Like many of CWI's professional-technical programs, the basic skills unit was in effect acquired whole from Boise State University. Its instructional staff do not have faculty status, but instead carry the designation of "teacher." Nonetheless, these professionals clearly exert appropriate control of their courses, pedagogy, and curricula.

At the state level, the basic skills program is administered through the Idaho Professional-Technical Education office. For local data collection, CWI uses the Idaho Management and Accountability System (IMAS). Currently CWI's basic skills students, like their business partnerships/workforce development counterparts, are not tracked through the college's Datatel system. Their educational experiences do not appear on CSI transcripts.

Standard 2.D — Student Support Resources

A comprehensive array of appropriate programs and services to support student learning needs is available to College of Western Idaho students — though often on a limited basis — across the varied campuses of the college. Interviews with students, staff, and faculty confirmed that the student services staff is skilled, knowledgeable, and caring. A dedicated administrative staff supports these programs.

Setting aside traditional models of student service programming, CWI has adopted an innovative, distributed model of delivery through the creation of multi-faceted one-stop centers at four sites, each staffed by cross-trained enrollment specialists whose goal is serving students in literally one stop. The objective is to answer 80 percent of all questions concerning admissions, academic advising, registration, financial aid, disability services, and business services through these centers' generalist staff. For more complicated issues, instant messaging provides for immediate communication with specialists.

The quantum growth in CWI's enrollment, however, has created a demand for services that has far outweighed the capacity of the one-stop centers. The evaluation committee heard repeated concerns about long waiting lines, service gaps, and staff workload at the one-stops.

Concern: While CWI's student services team has demonstrated an innovative and courageous effort in the development and implementation of its distributed model of service delivery, the college is urged to further develop the model and increase staffing to better serve students.

College-wide interviews confirmed that College of Western Idaho makes adequate provision for the safety and security of its students and employees and their property. In both student and staff forums, a strong consensus was expressed that the college campuses are safe. A security contractor maintains a presence on all campuses from 6:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Evaluator observations confirmed a high visibility of security officers and excellent lighting around the campuses at night. Additional security efforts provided in varied locations include panic buttons in front-line areas and security cameras. An annual report of crime statistics has been developed and maintained as required under federal and state regulations. The college's Clery Act report is easily found on the college website.

CWI subscribes to the RAVE Emergency Notification System of email and text notification to

students and employees in emergency situations. Each college building has a designated supervisor responsible for emergency response. Officials have developed some emergency preparedness plans and have published an *Emergency Handbook*. In interviews with staff and faculty, however, an interest was expressed in the college developing a more comprehensive plan to address threat assessment and critical incident response. The *Self-Evaluation Report* (p. 69) similarly acknowledges CWI's current lack of procedures for disaster-recovery. These refinements will deserve the continued attention of CWI officials, going forward.

A review of the college catalog and website confirmed that College of Western Idaho publishes current and accurate information that includes the institutional mission and core themes, entrance requirements and procedures, grading policy, full-time faculty qualifications, tuition and fees, refund policies, financial aid resources, and the academic calendar. Clear guidelines and procedures insure that the college recruits and admits students with the potential to benefit from its educational offerings. The college provides an optional new-student program, Navigate for Success, which orients students to ensure they understand the requirements related to their programs of study and receive timely, useful, and accurate information and advising about relevant academic requirements, registration, and college resources. In fall 2011, over 100 students participated at both Ada County and Nampa campuses.

Concern: Adequate policies and procedures regarding student admission, placement, continuation and termination from educational programs have not yet been developed and included in official board policies.

Staff and faculty interviews confirmed that in the event of program elimination or significant change in requirements, the college makes appropriate arrangements to ensure that students have an opportunity to complete their program in a timely manner with a minimum of disruption.

The registrar indicated that the college adheres to accepted practices regarding the secure retention of student information, including provision for reliable and retrievable backup of student records. Maintained in electronic form, back-up records are secured on an off-site server hosted by a contracted service. CWI follows established policies and procedures, as outlined by Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), for confidentiality and release of student data. That information is readily available to students in the college catalog and on CWI's web site. Interviews with Human Resources Department staff indicated that all new employees are made aware of FERPA regulations and sign records-privacy forms during New Employee Information/Orientation sessions. FERPA training is provided to all student services supervisors on a semester basis and, from time to time, at in-services for faculty.

Interviews with CWI's financial aid director and a review of practices confirmed that the college provides an effective and accountable program of financial aid. The college catalog and website provide excellent information regarding the categories of financial assistance, including grants, scholarships, and loans. Even so, some first-semester students in one forum indicated a lack of knowledge of financial aid systems and processes.

Correspondence with financial aid recipients includes information on loan repayment obligations, and CWI provides loan counseling as required by federal statute. The financial aid

director confirmed that the college regularly monitors student loan programs and the institution's loan default rate — a process that's complicated by the fact that, because CWI's financial aid is currently awarded through College of Southern Idaho, the local default rate is currently incorporated with CSI's. College of Western Idaho has developed its own default prevention plan to be implemented January 2012.

Compliment: The director of financial aid has been instrumental in developing improved systems for processing of financial aid and has provided CSI with guidance and assistance in their systems.

The college website, catalog, and *Student Handbook* suggest that guidelines and procedures are in place for a systematic and effective program of academic advisement to support student development and success. The enrollment specialists at CWI's four one-stop centers are trained to provide academic advising. In fall 2011, over 60 sessions of group advising and registration were available to students. In addition, the college offers the Personal Academic & Career Enhancement (PACE) program to provide additional advising and career services for undecided, underprepared, or academically struggling students.

Despite these resources, the evaluators did not find convincing evidence of a comprehensive or consistent practice of strong academic advising at the college. Although the *Self-Evaluation Report* (p. 52) suggests that all students are assigned an advisor and develop an academic plan, most student-forum respondents indicated that they had not participated in and did not have knowledge of orientation programs or advising services. A limited number of students indicated that they had developed an educational plan. According to the *Self-Evaluation Report*, CWI plans to expand its advising services through the training and assignment of faculty advisors. While students, staff, and faculty spoke to strong advising of professional-technical students by their instructors, the relative scarcity of full-time faculty in general education limits the capacity for taking a similar advising approach there. To implement it would require each faculty to advise approximately 100 students.

Concern: The college is urged to move forward with developing and implementing a realistic and sustainable plan for academic advising, particularly for general education students. The plan should address workload concerns that might otherwise arise from the current levels of student services staffing and full-time general education faculty.

At present, College of Western Idaho supports few co-curricular activities. Student governance exists at the college through the Associated Students of the College of Western Idaho (ASCWI). The ASCWI continues to evolve and develop in its first full year of existence. The college provides financial and personnel resources to ASCWI. Its student leaders serve on the College Council and on college committees and attend the board of trustees' meetings. A number of student clubs and organizations have been chartered consistent with curricular areas. A process is in place for student club creation, including a mandatory club orientation program. Initial funding for new clubs is provided by ASCWI. No collegiate athletic programs currently exist at the college, though some student interest in developing club sports was expressed in student forums. Food service is limited to a coffee stand, hot dog stand, or vending machines on some of the college campuses. Lack of food service was not a major concern, however, as students and

staff indicated that they either bring food to campus or drive off-campus to eat. The college has a small bookstore on the Nampa Campus. While students described the bookstore staff as very customer-friendly and helpful, they expressed frustration with the limitations of the bookstore to serve the ever-growing student population.

In various forums, CWI's students, staff, and faculty indicated a need to further develop a sense of community for students and a desire for increased co-curricular activities. Throughout the campuses, casual space for student interaction has been created. Students are already using that space to capacity. As the college grows, students and staff alike expressed desire for a Student Center as well as interest in fitness center/gym.

Interviews with the manager of online learning and college staff verified that the college ensures identity verification process for distance education students using unique and secure authentication into the learning management system and other necessary services.

Standard 2.E — Library and Information Resources

College of Western Idaho's library services clearly reflect the institution's newness, its rapid expansion, and the challenges of meeting the demands of growth. Though the college, its recently-hired director of library services, and the library staff have made progress in meeting the needs of the college's programs, much remains to be done.

Evidence of library data collection, tracking, and organization was insufficient to demonstrate that the college currently holds or provides access to library and information resources with adequate levels of currency, depth, and breadth to support CWI's learning outcomes across campus locations and online. The college's sole library facility, located at the Nampa Campus, is physically small. Its print resources are, in the current evaluators' opinion, very low in proportion to the number of students enrolled in coursework at the college. Databases shared with the College of Southern Idaho library account for the majority of online resources available at CWI. Student interviews verified that students who use the library facility have often had to seek resources to support their research from other libraries. Despite its participation in the statewide LiLI Unlimited inter-library loan program, the director indicated that the CWI library currently does not have reciprocal borrowing agreements allowing patrons to borrow materials from other community libraries.

As noted in the *Self-Evaluation Report* (pp. 54-55), a large share of the library's current resources has been funded by grants. Library budget information provided during the evaluation conflicted with the *Self-Evaluation Report's* assertion (p. 57) that a special library credit-hour fee is being made available for library materials and additional library staffing.

No substantial evidence was found to demonstrate the regular, systematic evaluation of library and information resources and services. Though library staff are encouraged to prioritize data collection and reporting in order to better inform planning for resources and services, the library currently does not compile a report detailing specific collection holdings, usage statistics, expenditures or other data. The director verified that CWI plans to incorporate feedback from library users gathered in forthcoming campus satisfaction surveys.

The CWI Library Advisory Committee is actively meeting and includes a broad representation of college students and faculty under the guidance of the director. As noted in the *Self-Evaluation Report*, that group is continuing to formalize the library's policies and procedures.

Integration of library services with instructional programs likewise remains a work in progress. The director of library services is a member of the Curriculum Committee and provides feedback regarding adequacy of library materials to support proposed courses and programs prior to their approval. Similarly, general education program and discipline reviews include assessment of how each program or discipline uses library and information resources. These assessments are intended to promote productive discussions between faculty and library personnel. At the course level, descriptions for several offerings, primarily in composition and English, note that students must use library services for research.

However, the current evaluators found evidence of the integration of library resources in the professional-technical education (PTE) programs to be largely absent. On-site interviews of PTE faculty, students, and library staff indicated that few PTE faculty work regularly with library staff to ensure that library resources are used effectively in the learning process. Further, the library's current services and policies appear, at present, to support only students in credit courses, not those in basic skills or community outreach. The director plans to initiate contacts with professional-technical faculty to begin to the process of encouraging greater integration of information literacy across the curriculum. While those efforts are commendable, the library's limited staffing levels are a potential additional barrier to successful and consistent integration of information literacy across the curriculum.

Interviews with the director of library services verified that information literacy instruction is provided at the student orientation and to general education courses throughout the semester. The evaluators were unable to locate information literacy tutorials linked from the library website as identified in the *Self-Evaluation Report*.

Compliment: The new director has made remarkable progress toward increasing and promoting student and faculty awareness of the library's virtual presence as well as toward securing the approval and implementation of the *CWI Library Operating Manual*.

Concern: The college is urged to develop concrete plans to ensure integration of library information services into the full range of CWI's instructional programs, beginning with professional-technical education and broadening to include the core theme areas of basic skills and community outreach. Library resources and staffing should be considered in this work.

Standard 2.F — Financial Resources

Given its short lifespan and extraordinary demand for services, College of Western Idaho has achieved a high degree of near-term financial stability, with sufficient cash flow, healthy financial ratios, and growing reserves to support its programs and services. Despite declining state support, CWI's financial planning reflects realistic development of financial resources and appropriate risk-management to ensure short-term solvency and a developing ability to meet

anticipated long-term obligations. The college has no debt and has maintained a conservative approach to limit future liabilities.

The college has adopted a modified zero-based budget policy that is built annually in collaboration with a budget officer appointed within each cost center. Budget policies, guidelines, and processes for financial planning and budget development are clearly defined and carefully reviewed by the board of trustees. Planning and budgeting projections are conservative and realistic. The college has never had an overall budget deficit and has generated a surplus in every year of operation.

The current evaluation committee heard widespread concerns, however, that CWI's current expenditure plans may have begun to fall behind the demand for services. Inadequate library personnel and resources, shortages of advising and student support staff, and a potential over-reliance on adjunct faculty were commonly cited as examples of this divergence between allocations and needs. An initial five-year budget projection is now being updated to account for rapid growth and change, a process that may offer a timely opportunity for reassessment.

Concern: While the college has met the demands of rapid growth and capital requirements to date in remarkable fashion and is beginning to build financial reserves, college planners are encouraged, going forward, to balance fiscal sustainability with the growing demands for day-to-day resources to enhance student progression and completion.

The college ensures timely and accurate financial information through its use of the Datatel enterprise system, which follows generally accepted accounting principles and provides numerous reporting options. Access is controlled by role-based security profiles. The college relies on threshold-review procedures and cost-center budget managers to provide an effective system of internal controls. Compliance is reviewed annually by outside auditors.

The college has embarked on long-term capital planning to accommodate future growth consistent with its mission and core theme objectives. Ambitious plans for physical facilities and acquisition of equipment are well underway in support of growing programs. Long-range capital plans support the institution's mission and goals and reflect realistic projections of the total cost of ownership, equipment, furnishing, and operation of new or renovated facilities. All physical facilities are owned or leased without any debt service.

The college currently has only one auxiliary enterprise in the bookstore. Bookstore operations are currently under the control of CSI but will transfer to a third-party commercial operation later this year. The college plans to use income from auxiliary services to support general operations.

Since the first year of operation, the college has undergone an external financial audit by an outside CPA firm and has been found to be in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards with no material findings noted. Audit results, including findings and management letter recommendations, are considered in a timely, appropriate, and comprehensive manner by the administration and the board of trustees.

All college fundraising activities are conducted in a professional and ethical manner and comply

with governmental requirements. The college has established the College of Western Idaho Foundation with a large and distinguished board that has already obtained considerable community financial support. The foundation has embarked on an ambitious capital campaign and has made remarkable progress in establishing links between the community and the college in a short period of time.

Standard 2.G — Physical and Technological Infrastructure

Physical Infrastructure

The College of Western Idaho has acquired physical facilities that are accessible, safe, secure, and currently sufficient in quantity and quality to support the institution's mission, programs, and services. An ambitious expansion program is underway to secure space for additional growth.

Though space is at a premium college-wide, many of the current buildings include attractive and welcoming student engagement spaces that are heavily used. Likewise, "smart" classrooms with robust audio visual capability are the norm in new instructional spaces. Plans for future facilities retain this emphasis on high-quality learning environments, both formal and informal.

The college currently adheres to appropriate policies and procedures regarding the safe use, storage, and disposal of hazardous or toxic materials through cooperative agreements with Boise State University and other contractors. Processes for CWI independently to handle hazardous materials from its professional-technical education (PTE) programs are being developed in conjunction with plans to move to the new PTE Program Center in summer 2012.

The college has developed and is regularly reviewing and revising a master plan for its physical development that is consistent with its mission, core themes, and long-range plans.

Facility tours and interviews with faculty and staff indicated that CWI's current equipment stock is sufficient in quantity and quality and is managed appropriately to support instructional goals and institutional functions. The college is investing significantly in additional equipment to fully equip the new PTE Program Center.

Technological Infrastructure

The Datatel Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, some portions of which are still currently in implementation, provides a robust technology platform for the College of Western Idaho's operations. The college has licensed the entire suite of Datatel products, which support both administrative and academic functions. Planned for operation in early 2012, a new student portal will significantly expand student support resources on-line. All CWI locations already have robust access to internet resources, including wireless access for students.

The college's Information Technology Department provides training, help-desk support, and classroom technology support to ensure that faculty, staff, students, and administrators make effective use of the institution's technology and technology systems. Faculty are provided with specific support and training to use Blackboard and related instructional software tools.

To guide its technological infrastructure planning, the college has created advisory committees from its technology support staff and the constituencies who rely on technology for institutional operations, programs, and services. The college has established a technology update and replacement plan to ensure that its technology remains current. Through consortium and cooperative agreements, CWI is striving to keep the total cost of ownership low and the quality of infrastructure high.

Planning

Standard 3.A — Institutional Planning

As a start-up institution with little history and few resources to draw on, College of Western Idaho relied heavily on consultants in developing its initial institutional plans. With support from private foundations, the college's trustees and early leadership engaged entities such as the California Collegiate Brain Trust (CCBT) and Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. (EMSI) to research, craft, and publish a series of planning documents to guide CWI's opening years. Compiled between summer 2009 and late-spring 2010, CCBT's foundational documents include the 153-page *College of Western Idaho Fact Book 2009*, a 158-page *Educational Master Plan 2010-15*, and *Making Decisions at the College of Western Idaho 2010*, a 36-page proposed model for CWI's governance. Additionally, the scope of CCBT's contract included the development of more specific plans, including a financial plan, facilities plan, staffing plan, and individual unit plans. Finally, CCBT worked directly with the trustees to revise board policies and to develop the board's *Strategic Directions 2010-15* document.

It is only since the 2010-11 year, then, that CWI has been able to begin developing and implementing its own ongoing planning mechanisms. While the college's start-up approach was clearly appropriate to the circumstances at the time, it has resulted in some challenges now that CWI is maturing as an institution:

- *Alignment with core themes:* CWI's initial planning cycles and priorities are not always fully aligned with the core themes. While the themes are regularly mentioned in planning documents, the evaluators did not find convincing evidence that CWI's planning processes are authentically or comprehensively integrated with mission fulfillment as defined by CWI's core themes. As one key example, CWI's *Strategic Directions 2010-15* only tangentially reflect the core themes.
- *Transparency and constituent engagement:* CWI's approach to start-up planning has not necessarily adapted well to the college's emerging interest in participatory governance. In on-site interviews, constituent-group leaders expressed little knowledge of or engagement in the development of CWI's plans. For example, the College Council reported that it had begun to make recommendations around institutional plans, but admitted that that initial input was the result of a specific request for feedback, rather than a formalized step in CWI's planning cycle. In short, though CWI's leadership expressed a clear interest in wider participation in college-wide planning, it was unclear to the evaluators how constituent groups would have broad, systematic, and meaningful engagement in future cycles.

- *Data availability:* The college's start-up consultants relied largely on projections and external environmental measures to shape their recommendations. CWI's internal data systems are, at present, inadequate to support a full transition to truly mission-based and core theme-based assessment. Representatives of CWI's Institutional Reporting Committee noted that, given the misalignment of CWI's and College of Southern Idaho's data systems, data integrity is difficult to ensure. Data queries were also described as difficult to manage due to inter-institutional variance. The evaluators were not able to identify reports that routinely assess mission fulfillment as defined by the core themes. The hoped-for full conversion to Datatel, the appointment of a college researcher, and the development of draft Institutional Progress Metrics promise to help remedy these gaps.
- *Alignment of resources and capacity:* The evaluation committee noted some apparent discrepancies between CWI's core themes and its priorities as evidenced by investments of resources and capacity. Community outreach's place in CWI's long-term plans was, in particular, unclear. Similarly, the basic skills core theme, though clearer in its goals, appeared organizationally isolated from CWI's core functions.

College of Western Idaho finds itself in the challenging position of converting from start-up to long-range institutional planning at the same time that it is seeking accreditation under new, core theme-driven standards. Those challenges are reflected in the individual themes themselves.

Core Themes

Core Theme 1: Professional-Technical Education

Introduction

Core Theme 1, "Professional-Technical Education," commits the College of Western Idaho to the task of preparing southwest Idaho's professional-technical workforce. As evidenced in program assessments and planning documents, the college has substantiated the workforce need for its professional-technical education (PTE) programs.

Many of College of Western Idaho's professional-technical education programs came to the institution from Boise State University's Seland College, where they had a long history. Faculty are dedicated. Current labs are organized and well equipped, with the new PTE Program Center promising to improve the PTE learning environments even further. During the evaluation visit, students were observed as very engaged in structured learning activities. They reported a high level of satisfaction with PTE programs and faculty.

Interviews with staff, faculty, and administrators indicated that this core theme, like some of its counterparts, was determined at the college's highest leadership levels. Accordingly, the evaluation committee was not able to determine which staff outlined the objectives and indicators of achievement, nor did staff appear to take ownership in the objectives or indicators

Nevertheless, trustees, administrative leaders, staff, and students all identified the need for professional-technical education as a critical reason behind the very establishment of the College of Western Idaho. This commitment clearly illustrated why professional-technical education is one of CWI's core themes.

Standard 3.B — Core Theme Planning

College of Western Idaho's professional-technical education (PTE) programs participate in regular program reviews. Program assessment reports cite retention and completion rates as indicators of the quality and effectiveness of PTE programs. From those reviews, recent program analysis reports have been used to identify areas for improvement, which the college has taken seriously. However, documents and interviews suggest that these processes, which pre-date the core themes, remain somewhat removed from the core objectives themselves.

Standard 4.A — Core Theme Assessment

Core Theme 1 includes three objectives: program alignment with industry standards, student preparation for careers or further education, and sustainability of PTE programs and services. Clearly, these initial objectives are in many ways appropriate and potentially useful in assessment. However, the evaluation committee's on-site interviews revealed a number of concerns regarding the data and the relevance of the achievement indicators for Core Theme 1.

Objective 1 — Professional-Technical Education Programs are Aligned with Industry Standards incorporates two indicators of achievement. The first requires that each program "aligns with industry standards" as determined by the industry representatives on CWI's five- to 15-member technical advisory committees (TACs). Though industry-alignment is a surely a reasonable objective to measure, the current data is gathered from only a small number of advisory committee members, compromising the strength of the results for decision-making. Some of the participating TAC members employed graduates, but no other employers were surveyed.

Indicator 2 sets a benchmark of 75 percent for students demonstrating "technical competency through a technical skills assessment." While the state-required Technical Skills Assessment (TSA) instruments offer a promising tool for evaluation, in many cases the current CWI data for the number of TSA completers and their pass rates do not match with the numbers of graduates for the programs themselves. In other cases, TSA completion rates are very low. To address these gaps, interviewees shared that there are plans to integrate the TSA into a course that is a requirement for graduation. No rationale for the 75 percent benchmark was offered.

Objective 2 — Professional-Technical Students are Prepared for Related Careers or the Continuation of Their Career likewise is measured by two indicators. Indicator 1 tracks employment and transfer rates for PTE graduates, with a one-year benchmark of 75 percent. Again, no rationale is articulated for the percentage goal. The numbers of PTE students tracked for job placement is currently very low. In on-site interviews, the validity of that data was questioned by department chairs, faculty, and the research administrator. Given that job placement is a well established indicator of PTE program effectiveness, it is critical that this data be effectively tracked. A new plan to provide more complete employment data, potentially with multiple indices, is in process. It is suggested, further, that employment information be

disaggregated from transfer data, particularly since convenient transfer options for PTE graduates are limited. Further, the transfer rate, though important, by itself does not reflect how well students perform after transfer — another important element to examine.

Indicator 2 measures student satisfaction with their preparation, at an 80 percent goal for positive responses on exit survey reports. While student satisfaction surveys offer a promising avenue to assess a key perspective of program quality, the evaluators found that there was a low exit-survey return rate, which comprises the validity of data from the exit survey.

Finally, *Objective 3 —Professional-Technical Education Ensures the Sustainability of its Programs and Services* also includes two achievement indicators, both process-related. These measure PTE program participation, first, in strategic planning and, second, in the program review process. In on-site interviews, neither indicator of achievement for Objective 3 was widely supported by CWI staff and administrative leaders. The processes identified in these indicators doubtless reflect good practice, but it could be questioned whether participation in a planning and analysis process will ensure the sustainability of a program. Broad-based strategic planning is not yet underway at CWI.

Throughout the evaluation committee’s visit, it was clear that the college administrators, staff, and faculty members are aware of the need to review and refine core theme indicators for clarity and relevance. Staff expressed some concern that these goals and measures had been established without broad college involvement and, further, could not readily be changed due to the college’s approval process timelines. Often, data was described as “evolving” and was inconsistent. Materials on-site and interviews with staff and faculty showed that procedures for integrating, analyzing, and reporting the data does not necessarily reflect achievement of the objectives.

Compliment: Despite challenges in fully implementing the professional-technical education core theme, students had high praise for the PTE programs and their faculty. Professional-technical faculty and leadership are strong and passionate about their programs and the future of the college and PTE programs. Collectively, the PTE programs’ strengths are a reflection of a quality PTE faculty, administrative leadership, and technical advisory committees.

Standard 4.B. — Core Theme Improvement

Though the core theme indicators and measures themselves have yet to play a well-defined role in planning for College of Western Idaho’s professional-technical education programs, plans are nonetheless underway to strengthen those programs. Better facilities, for example, will be provided by the new PTE Program Center. Some interviews suggested an interest in expanding programs to meet new and emerging industry needs.

Meantime, however, faculty, administrative leadership, and staff consistently report that they are stretched due to staff shortages and turnover, lag time in hiring replacements, inadequate orientation to new roles, and expanded workloads. The stabilization of faculty, administrative leadership, and instructional support will be important for the strengthening of this core theme. Similarly, the geographic spread of programs across multiple campuses creates challenges for support and communication. Students are challenged to complete courses while traveling

between campuses — a problem that greater coordination in scheduling could assist. While some PTE programs will move closer together in the PTE Program Center, distances will continue to present challenges to communication and support.

The improvement of accurate data will help with the PTE programs' evaluation and improvement processes, especially in ensuring that a solid foundation is in place to support the current offerings before additional expansion creates additional strains.

Core Theme 2: General Education

Introduction

General education programs at College of Western Idaho provide transfer credits up to the Associate of Arts (AA) and Associate of Science (AS) degrees through both traditional and distance-delivery methods in western Idaho and beyond. To support this core theme, CWI maintains articulation agreements with all Idaho public colleges and universities through an Idaho State Board of Education articulation policy which provides that students who receive an AA or AS may transfer to any public four-year school in Idaho with junior-level standing.

The college offers a majority of its transfer classes at three locations in Nampa — the Aspen Classroom Building, Nampa Campus, and Canyon County Center — but also provides a number of transfer courses at other locations. CWI's general education program, including hybrid and on-line offerings, has grown substantially since spring 2009.

Standard 3.B — Core Theme Planning

Planning for general education is conducted through CWI's annual program and discipline review process, a holistic evaluation that includes information resources, facilities needs, student support services, and staffing needs. Data for these reviews include average class size and fill rates, retention and grade distribution, and end-of-course evaluations. Collectively, these reports provide meaningful information on enrollment demands, persistence and completion, and quality of instruction. Additionally, the general education area generates some of its own data through department surveys to help assess performance and plan for growth, to assess faculty needs, to assess the general functionality of departments, and to track outcomes assessment results at the course, program, and general education core levels.

General education continues to work with IT and the registrar's office to gain better training and access in regard to program-relevant data. General education's planning is informed by the data it has access to and will incorporate more data as it becomes possible to do so.

Standard 4.A — Core Theme Assessment

CWI has established two objectives with five indicators of achievement for the Core Theme 2.

Objective 1 — General Education Prepares Students for Successful Continuation of Their Education at the Baccalaureate Level incorporates four indicators of achievement. The first two objectives set benchmarks for transfer rates and post-transfer GPA — clearly appropriate

measures of transfer preparation. Indicator 3 shifts the emphasis from students to program activity, calling for 80 percent of CWI's transfer programs to articulate 2+2 agreements with an Idaho university. Indicator 4 looks at student satisfaction as a measure of program quality, setting a goal of 80 percent for end-of-course evaluation responses indicating student satisfaction with their preparation for "continuation in higher education." While this indicator has potential value, it is currently measured by a single question "Rate the satisfaction of this course." It was noted that this question could be better phrased to reflect the language of the indicator.

Though the indicators for Objective 1 collectively hold promise, additional challenges can be seen in the benchmarking process. The *Self-Evaluation Report* (p. 88) is frank in admitting that the Indicator 1 benchmark itself "was adopted in the absence of any institutional data" and concludes that Indicator 2's sample size was too small to be meaningful.

Objective 2 — General Education Is Actively Engaged in a Continuous Improvement Process has only one indicator of achievement, which, like its counterparts in the other core themes, focuses on process — participation in program and discipline reviews — rather than objective performance. At CWI, department chairs and faculty have been responsible for conducting these annual reviews since 2010. Though their intent is for a holistic evaluation of program needs, those processes are not fully integrated with the general education core theme. There is a need for measurable outcomes and definitive strategic planning goals to create a continuous improvement process that is driven by the core theme objectives.

Standard 4.B. — Core Theme Improvement

Overall, the current evaluators' on-site interviews revealed a lack of depth of understanding of how to establish benchmarks and measurements for the intended general education core theme. To date, the college has not been able to accurately define meaningful indicators and assessment strategies to demonstrate achievement of the general education core theme objectives.

The *Self-Evaluation Report* (p. 84) acknowledges that the core theme assessment process is encumbered by the type and quality of data available, the training provided to faculty and staff in the use of data, and the human resources available to process data requests. On-site interviews confirmed that data structures are either not in place, scattered, incomplete, or limited by multiple incompatible data bases.

Without a robust system for the collection and analysis of appropriate data, it is not possible to fully complete an effective assessment of student learning to inform academic and learning-support planning that leads to the successful enhancement of student learning achievements.

Core Theme 3: Basic Skills Education

Introduction

Basic skills education addresses diverse literacy and workforce needs. College of Western Idaho provides access and varied educational opportunities for adult students in the region's

communities through its non-credit classes in basic academic skills, GED preparation, English as a Second Language, and preparation for transition to post-secondary education.

Standard 3.B — Core Theme Planning

Materials on-site, the *Self-Evaluation Report*, and interviews with staff, teachers, and administrators indicated that initial Core Theme 3 planning was accomplished by a Core Theme Committee which met regularly to develop the objectives and indicators, and to identify the Strategic Directions with which they believed basic skills education aligned. A smaller group developed the theme's objectives and indicators and reported back to the campus-wide Core Theme Planning Committee. The Institutional Assessment Committee helped to identify potential supporting data.

The basic skills education program clearly supports College of Western Idaho's mission. However, how closely the new core theme objectives align with and define CWI's mission remains somewhat unclear because of the lack of institutional data for basic skills separate from the existing state and federal data that have historically shaped the local program's plans.

Given that the basic skills education program came to CWI basically whole and intact from Boise State University, a challenge continues to be how to elevate the importance of the program within the college structure and how to effectively integrate it into CWI's planning and development processes. Greater collaboration and coordination across areas such as enrollment and student services, planning and assessment, and instruction could advance the achievement of the program's primary objective — to “improve students' skills to prepare them for further education and training.” Research indicates that retention and transition to college-level education and training is improved with greater interactions with student advising and planning to identify pathways for students.

Concern: While the basic skills program has been accepted as one of the college's mission areas, there is a need to further integrate the program into CWI's overall institutional planning and assessment. There is not clear evidence of an alignment of the Core Theme 3 as an integral part of institutional structures and priorities.

Standard 4.A — Core Theme Assessment

Core Theme 3 includes two objectives: to improve students' skills to prepare them for further education and training, and to engage in a continuous improvement process. The indicators for Objective 1 include educational functioning level (EFL) gains and transitions to post-secondary training, along with student satisfaction. Objective 2 calls on the program to engage in continuous improvement.

Unsurprisingly, the data for these indicators draw heavily on existing state reporting measures. Planning and assessment are foundational activities to basic skills education, where program evaluations are influenced by funding sources and often reflect grant guidelines and requirements. The programs are accustomed to assessing student progress and fulfilling accountability requirements by reporting student performance data to the appropriate state agency. In Idaho, that agency is the Idaho Professional-Technical Education office. For data

collection, CWI's program uses the Idaho Management and Accountability System (IMAS) to inform instruction, curriculum planning, and class offerings. Currently, the basic skills students are not tracked through the college's data system, Datatel. As a result, the director of planning and assessment must rely on data provided from the program rather than being able to provide data and analysis to the program throughout the year. Discussions are occurring to determine ways that the program might be integrated into overall planning for the college through meaningful and holistic data collection.

Though guided by state and federal standards, the internal assessment processes in CWI's basic skills education program are led by a strong, experienced team of teacher-coordinators and a director that keeps cycles of review moving, initiates discussions about program goals and intended outcomes, and disseminates assessment results. Since basic skills programs are incremental and progressive to support students moving to higher levels of educational challenge, the program could benefit from developing a stronger alignment of course and program outcomes with institutional student learning outcomes (SLOs). The use of student learning assessment is essential across the institution and can lead directly to program changes and improvements so that students can more easily and efficiently achieve educational goals and successfully transition to post-secondary education and training.

CWI's program has recently added the position of ABE quality assurance coordinator to monitor program compliance and to assist in data analysis to guide continuous program improvement. This coordinator is in a unique position to assist the program in strengthening its integration into the greater institutional planning processes. Having two data systems is a challenge, but there might be an opportunity to identify ways to maximize the data from both systems to enhance program quality and support the goal of continuous program improvement.

Standard 4.B. — Core Theme Improvement

The *Self-Evaluation Report* and supporting exhibits include numerous examples of how the basic skills education program utilizes data to make improvements in courses, programs, and procedures. The program engages in inquiry projects annually for the Idaho Professional Technical Education office through its AIDDE (Analysis, Identify, Design, Document, and Evaluation) protocol. The program documents these continuous-improvement projects and their use in planning and decision-making.

Staff and faculty report that being identified as a core theme has led to a more research and data-driven approach to assessment, as well as to additional institutional guidance and scrutiny. The objectives of Core Theme 3 have assisted program staff in identifying additional, meaningful indicators of achievement. An increased emphasis on data quality and integration will provide more consistent and reliable information to students and more accurate data to use for program planning and evaluation. Basic skills education clearly has the potential to be a successful core theme that can contribute significantly to the fulfillment of the college mission. The college has successfully transitioned a quality educational program into its framework, and now can begin efforts to strengthen its role within the institution and to enhance student learning achievements.

Compliment: The college is fortunate to have teachers and staff in basic skills education who serve with dedication, flexibility, years of experience, and an optimistic spirit of innovation. The program has been welcomed into the college family, and the teachers and staff demonstrate a focus on student success. The program is exemplary in its provision of instruction to address diverse literacy needs and provide access to educational opportunities for adult students in various communities throughout the region.

Core Theme 4: Community Outreach

Introduction

Community outreach is comprised of two areas: business partnerships/workforce development (BP/WD) and community education. Taken together, these programs round out College of Western Idaho’s mission and its suite of services to the community by offering avenues for non-credit personal enrichment, employment training, and community development.

Standard 3.B — Core Theme Planning

For CWI’s business partnerships/workforce development (BP/WD) programs, general planning activities take place on an ongoing basis. Advisory committees comprised of industry members, business partnerships employees, and faculty meet regularly to review programs and industry needs, as well as to explore potential partnerships. Program coordinators monitor changes to state and national licensure requirements for program areas. Student evaluations, feedback from technical advisory committees, and licensure changes inform program and services planning. Business partnerships and workforce development (BP/WD) is not explicitly mentioned in the college’s *Strategic Directions* document. Nonetheless, in on-site interviews, a variety of CWI officials expressed hope that BP/WD offerings might eventually become a profit center for the college, providing needed revenue to support basic operational functions. However, no specific plans to achieve that goal were provided — an unsurprising gap, given that the *Self-Evaluation Report* (p. 99) flatly states that “neither community education or BP/WD had strategic plans” in 2009-10.

The evaluators could not locate substantive evidence of either regular or strategic planning for community education. The program primarily uses informal student satisfaction surveys to plan and develop new courses. Interviews with community outreach staff confirmed that no department strategic planning has recently taken place. In part, these gaps in planning may reflect a larger, institutional uncertainty about the program’s direction. An interview with the director of business partnerships indicated that community education may undergo a repurposing and reassignment to a different area of business partnerships, serving as a feeder directly into the existing business partnership/workforce development programs. Other college officials, however, voiced support for retaining community education’s traditional role.

Standard 4.A — Core Theme Assessment

Like College of Western Idaho’s other core themes, Core Theme 4 includes a mix of both

performance- and process-related objectives and indicators as measures of achievement. Objective 1 focuses on participant satisfaction, employer satisfaction, and access for business partnership/workforce development (BP/WD) programming. Objective 2 proposes to track largely parallel measures for community education. Finally, the third objective speaks to sustainability through strategic planning and financial viability.

While these proposed objectives and indicators may eventually form the basis of an appropriate and effective system of achievement measurement for community outreach, the evaluators did not find convincing evidence that these tools are functioning meaningfully at this time. Evidence of Core Theme 4 assessment was largely absent from the Institutional Progress Metrics document provided by the college. Business partnership/workforce development (BP/WD) provided no data for four of the five indicators in Objective 1. Only anecdotal information was provided during on-site interviews. Similarly, though interviews with college staff indicated that community education classes are responsive to the needs of the community, data was available for only two of the three indicators for Objective 2, both of which were met.

The strongest source of program-effectiveness measurement is through user satisfaction surveys. Programs offered through both community education and business partnership/workforce development (BP/WD) are evaluated by the participants following the completion of each session. This feedback is provided to the advisory boards for review and integration into the program review process and to inform changes in program offerings and curriculum. Though employer satisfaction is an important and clearly appropriate measure for BP/WD offerings, no employer data has been collected to date. Troublingly, the director indicated that there are currently no plans to survey employers for which workforce training is provided, even though this data-point is specified in the core theme indicators.

Interviews with program coordinators for BP/WD verified that student learning is tracked at the program level through pass-rates on standardized exams for licensure. However, the *Self-Evaluation Report* (p.102) states that student achievement in community education is not measured. An interview with the project coordinator for community education indicated that course syllabi are not maintained. Faculty with teaching responsibilities in the area of health sciences, manufacturing, and community-based training are responsible for evaluating student achievement in alignment with clearly articulated learning outcomes present on course syllabi for these programs.

The sustainability measures in Objective 3 are equally troubling. Community outreach failed to meet either indicator for that objective. The director of business partnerships indicated that a business model is being followed in order to guarantee financial viability for community outreach. No documentation of this model or of the future financial viability of the current model was provided to the evaluators.

Standard 4.B. — Core Theme Improvement

The evaluators found that Core Theme 4 is not adequately assessed based on meaningful, institutionally-identified indicators of achievement at this time. The majority of core theme indicators were not met, and with a few key exceptions, data assessment and tracking are largely

absent from the Institutional Progress Metrics for the community outreach program. Uncertainty around the future role and make-up of these programs compounds the challenge of identifying coherent, evidence-based plans for improvement in Core Theme 4.

Concern: The evaluators did not find convincing, consistent evidence that College of Western Idaho evaluates holistically the alignment, correlation, and integration of planning, resources, capacity, practices, and assessment with respect to achievement of intended outcomes of its community outreach programs. The evaluators suggest the college revisit community outreach as a designated core theme and how its functions aligns with institutional mission, strategic planning, and college-wide priorities.

Mission Fulfillment, Monitoring, Adaptation and Sustainability

Standard 5.A — Mission Fulfillment

As noted at the outset of this report, College of Western Idaho's institutional planning processes are new, largely crafted by external consultants, the college trustees, and a small group of founding administrators. To their credit, the college's current leaders are clearly committed to developing a regular, systematic, participatory, self-reflective, and evidence-based system of assessment and planning in CWI's future. At present, however, that remains a goal, not a reality.

Though CWI has adopted an Institutional Progress Metric and has proposed revisions to its strategic planning process, much of this work remains conceptual at present. Several of the metrics, for example, have yet to be populated with data, and benchmarks of quality remain largely speculative there. Meantime, the Institutional Strategic Planning Process document neither references nor integrates the college's core themes, suggesting a potential lack of full alignment between mission fulfillment and the college's Strategic Directions.

To be sure, none of these findings should be surprising, given CWI's short history — a history that has corresponded with a significant change in accreditation standards. Further, there is no question that the College of Western Idaho is delivering — with excellence, even — the educational services defined by its four core themes. What remains is to integrate the college's various plans, goals, and measures into a coherent whole that will carry the institution from start-up planning to sustainable, long-term goal-setting and assessment that is truly mission-driven.

Standard 5.B — Adaptation and Sustainability

The College of Western Idaho has done a remarkable job of marshaling the resources necessary to evolve from its starting-point in 2009 to its present scope and size. That level of achievement surely required an extraordinary mix of bravery, optimism, adaptability, and hard work. As such, CWI's current status speaks positively to the ability of the institution to evaluate the adequacy of its resources, capacity, and effectiveness of operations to fulfill its mission.

Still, the current evaluation committee found reason for some concern around the long-range sustainability of CWI's resources, whether human, capital, or financial. Over the course of the

visit, employee groups of all kinds repeatedly expressed workload and retention concerns. College officials likewise acknowledged the challenges of continuing to expand CWI's services and infrastructure in an environment of decreasing government resources. The college's most promising sources of future revenue growth — tuition, donations, and contracted training — carry some risks both in adequacy and in predictability. Without the right attention, these fiscal realities could threaten CWI's ability to accomplish its core theme objectives, achieve its goals, and ensure that its programs and services continue to meet their intended outcomes.

Going forward, CWI will need to build on its initial, truly impressive successes to ensure that its long-term planning practices are equally effective in monitoring internal and external environments, strategically allocating resources and capacity, and assessing the results to make changes, as necessary, for improvement.

Summary

The people of the College of Western Idaho have literally achieved wonders over the institution's short lifespan. Starting from almost nothing, CWI has assembled an impressive faculty and staff, a functional infrastructure, and a relevant, high-quality set of educational programs. In doing so, the college's current employees have built the foundation for CWI's permanence as a critical resource for the surrounding community. At the same time, the rapid pace of CWI's growth and development has left clear opportunities to revisit and refine areas of basic institutional function and sustainability. The evaluation committee hopes that its commendations and recommendations constructively balance those dual realities.

Commendations

1. The trustees, administrative leaders, faculty and staff of the College of Western Idaho are commended for their vision, dedication, and commitment to undertaking the creation of a new community college to serve the people of Idaho's Treasure Valley. They have accepted this significant, long-term challenge with the community's benefit at heart.
2. College of Western Idaho is commended for the passion with which its trustees, administrative leaders, faculty, staff, and students have embraced CWI's mission and its promise to provide quality teaching and learning to the residents of western Idaho. Their enthusiasm has engaged local citizens, businesses, and community organizations as committed supporters of CWI's goals.
3. College of Western Idaho is commended for the high quality of educational services that it provides. The college has assembled a talented and dedicated faculty and staff, has promoted currency and relevance in curricula, and has fostered a culture of innovation in instructional delivery. Students of CWI report a high degree of satisfaction with their learning experiences.
4. Despite a pressing need for more space, College of Western Idaho is commended for its thoughtful planning for current and future facilities. Plans and investments have included informal student engagement space in new facilities, "smart" classrooms with

robust audio visual capability in new classroom construction, and significant investment in lab facilities and instructional equipment.

Recommendations

1. While acknowledging that the College of Western Idaho has made progress in developing initial core themes and proposed measures of mission fulfillment, the evaluation committee recommends that the college move aggressively to ensure that CWI's core themes align with clearly articulated and well-supported institutional priorities, that the core theme measures are meaningful, relevant, and assessable, and that the core theme assessment process is fully integrated with the college's planning and evaluation mechanisms (Standard 1.B.2, 3.B.1, 3.B.3., 4.A.1, 4.A.4 and ER 23).
2. In order to build on progress already made in initial institutional planning, the evaluation committee recommends the college establish an ongoing, systematic, and comprehensive cycle of integrated planning, resource allocation, and evaluation that leads to mission fulfillment as defined by CWI's core themes. Achieving this goal will require a robust system for the collection and analysis of appropriately defined data, as well mechanisms for meaningful input from faculty and staff (Standard 2.A.1, 3.A.1, 3.A.2, 3.A.3 and ER 23).
3. The evaluation committee recommends that the College of Western Idaho develop and implement plans to appoint full-time faculty and staff sufficient in numbers to accomplish the institution's educational goals (Standard 2.B.1, 2.B.4, 2.B.5, and ER 10).
4. While the College of Western Idaho has made admirable progress toward acquisition of library materials and enhancing the library's virtual presence, the evaluators did not find evidence of sufficient library infrastructure, staffing, or holdings to achieve the learning outcomes of CWI's rapidly expanding academic programs. Accordingly, the evaluation committee recommends immediate action to increase library services, staffing, and materials to adequately support programs at all campus locations (Standard 2.E.1 and ER13).
5. While the College of Western Idaho has met the demands of rapid growth, program acquisition and development, policy and governance development, and financial planning to date in a remarkable fashion, the evaluation committee recommends that the college should move promptly to develop and adopt a realistic plan for long-range sustainability that will address enrollment management, staff retention and development, fiscal stability, and support services that will enhance student progression and completion (Standard 5.B and ER 24).