

PROVOST'S EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Eastern Oregon University's ongoing mission and vision are clear—to be Oregon's premier selective undergraduate liberal arts university. All of the University's goals and strategic priorities issue from this ideal. All strategic planning and institutional assessment processes articulate this ideal.

This University interim self-study highlights accomplishments, plans, and challenges that reflect the University's evolving mission and vision as a regionally interactive liberal arts institution, as well as its constant attention to ongoing assessment and strategic planning.

This Executive Summary provides an introductory overview of this Interim Accreditation report's overarching framework and a philosophical perspective on its content.

The focus of the Interim Report fixes attention on three issues driving the University's strategic planning process and ongoing operations: quality, accessibility, and affordability.

Quality

The University's dedication to highest quality educational service clearly appears in its evolving mission and vision as a premier, selective liberal arts institution. This mission and vision combines a sustained perspective on the traditional liberal arts mission and the practical application of such a mission through the arts and sciences, innovative academic preparation for educators, and knowledge and skills essential to business.

Standard One covers five years' progress in the development of the University's Mission and Vision, its progress in university-wide assessment and strategic planning, and its commitment to making sure that the Mission and Vision inform every aspect of the institution with distinctive professional programs. Assessment and Strategic Planning have not progressed as quickly as the University has wished, due to a remarkable number of changes in the University's internal and external environments. At the same time, assessment is moving forward in the formation of a university-wide Assessment Committee and in plans for a Center for Teaching and Learning. Strategic Planning, which has moved forward through the turbulence of budgetary challenges, leadership transitions, and labor negotiations, nonetheless continues apace through an annual reporting process and campus-wide affirmation of the need to make innovative, effective changes to the traditional organizational models of the college-level academy.

The University's application for membership in the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) has involved not only the institution's increased participation on the national scene in terms of its Mission and Vision, but also a stipulation by COPLAC members that the University set forth a bold assertion of its liberal arts direction in the finalized Mission and Vision statement. The University is acting on this recommendation not only formally, through the language of an official document, but also through purposeful and innovative improvements in its general education program and its emerging Cornerstones Experiences and Honors programs (discussed in Standard Two). In both of these processes of improvement, the faculty has contributed with diligence and creativity.

Teaching and administrative faculty commitment to students and positive development of pedagogical approaches can clearly be seen in the academic program discussions of Standards Two and Three. The University's faculty members have engaged in collaborative efforts to set and meet goals and evolve assessment instruments.

Interim Accreditation Report 2003

The effectiveness of the University's internal assessments of teaching and learning can be seen in the excellence of many of its students. Student performance does not have to be gauged by the faculty's classroom assessments. It can also be assessed, among other things, by student-driven initiatives such as the Hispanic/Latino student organization La Raza and the learning outcomes communicated through presentations in the end-of-year Sharing the Learning Symposium.

The high quality of faculty and student interaction will undoubtedly drive new University programs such as the Bachelor of Arts or Science in Media Arts, the Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry, the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree, and the Master of Business Administration programs. This student/faculty collaboration will also enrich the campus learning environment of leading edge resources such as the new Science Center.

Accessibility

More than many other Pacific Northwest institutions in its category, EOU opens its doors to students through on- and off-campus venues that deliver whole programs as well as supplemental enhancements to on-campus offerings. The University does so through continually improved admissions and student support processes that are both rigorous and generous, a wide range of consortium agreements that advance the interests of the University and its institutional partners, and an exemplary distance education program that extends the University's degree and course offerings statewide and across the nation.

The University's admissions policy emphasizes congruence between increasingly selective standards and increased service to all entering students. In the last five years, the University has raised grade point admission standards as a performance measure in accordance with its status as a selective institution. At the same time, the University's entrance requirements are magnanimous, especially as regards the applicability of transfer credits. This generosity has resulted in an increasing number of transfer students from two- and four-year schools throughout the nation. Once students are admitted, consistent financial aid assistance and attentive advising usher them into the University and optimize student retention. Financial aid and personalized advising are equally rigorous at a distance as they are on-campus, provided by the directors of regional University centers across Oregon. These University processes, in addition to the quality and affordability the University offers, have produced a steady enrollment increase since the 1998 Interim Accreditation Report.

The University does not work alone or operate under the delusion that it should do so. A number of key consortium arrangements reveal its enthusiasm, aptitude, and adaptability as a partner with other institutions such as Blue Mountain Community College and Treasure Valley Community College, Oregon State University, and the Oregon Health Sciences University Nursing Program. The present report notes the continuing regional alliance between the University and its regional partners crystallized through the Eastern Oregon Collaborative Colleges Center, which optimizes articulation in academic and student support for students who must pursue their four-year degree programs through concurrent enrollment at the University and its regional community college partners.

The University's Division of Distance Education (DDE), the operational efficiencies of which are explored in the third part of this Interim Report, remains a very powerful and completely integrated part of the University. DDE's academic offerings and student support services are cutting-edge on at least four levels explored in this report: the Division's capability to provide full University degree programs, its high level of operational efficiency and integrity, its strong advising system, and its increasingly vital contribution to the University's budget and general operations. DDE's efforts serve both the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the School of Education and Business by assisting them in the dissemination of their offerings through distance education delivery, thereby demonstrating the University's simultaneous dedication to its traditional regional role and its expanding outreach function.

Provost's Executive Summary

Especially notable at this writing is DDE's expanded number of centers statewide and its assistance in delivering regional Education Program offerings.

Affordability

The University understands that, in order to serve all of its students, it must continue to prove itself affordable in difficult economic times. Historically, the University has been consistently affordable due to its exclusion requirement to charge out-of-state tuition and its comparatively low rates of tuition in general. Due to financial imperatives, however, the University has been compelled to eliminate the "credit ceiling" allowing students to pay no extra tuition above 12 credits, and it has also raised its tuition to help meet climbing costs.

Nonetheless, the University remains desirable from the perspective of affordability. The combination of tuition, fees, housing, and living expenses remains very reasonable, and the University continues to fund or facilitate targeted scholarships and financial aid to its fullest capacity.

Challenges

The University is well positioned to maintain, enhance, and expand the range of its mission and vision. Among other things, the University envisions the creation of an Eastern Oregon Center that would act simultaneously as a regional museum, archive, interactive venue, and general central locus for conversations regarding regional economic and cultural development. The University will also bring to fruition future partnerships, such as a cooperative research and learning program conducted with Oregon Health Sciences University and hosted in the new Science Building.

It would be folly, however, to downplay very real and serious challenges that the University faces. These include uncertain state funding allocation arrangements, shifting contexts for strategic planning processes such as enrollment management, and University negotiations with unions representing academic faculty and classified staff.

The labor negotiations constitute, without a doubt, one of the most complex and volatile challenges to the consensus process, institutional integrity, and even the sustainability of the University as a whole. University administrators understand and sympathize with the concerns of unionized University employees, and those employees have an equal concern for the continuity and strength of the University's administrative processes. Labor agreements, in fact, may prove to provide a desirable formal platform for proposing, discussing, and implementing constructive change across the campus.

On the other hand, the mutuality of interest between the University's stakeholders in ongoing labor negotiation does not nullify the dangers brought on by the labor negotiation process. For too long, universities have followed traditional academic and administrative models that have provided comforting continuity but resisted change, and unions representing members of universities have shared such a tendency. Change, however, can no longer be resisted. All parties in the University's current labor negotiations must come to grips with new imperatives brought on by changing times. Parallel to this, traditional administrative models must give way to new models adaptable at all times to economic uncertainty.

The University's students, staff, academic faculty, administrative faculty, and administrators all contribute to the University's Mission and Vision: "Oregon's premier selective undergraduate liberal

Interim Accreditation Report 2003

arts university.” In the most vital tradition of the liberal arts, this Mission and Vision is predicated on the creative embrace of change.

Eastern Oregon University is proud to present the Commission with the 2003 Interim Accreditation Report.