

Mid-Cycle Evaluation

Eastern Oregon University

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

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Evaluators

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Introduction

This report addresses the primary questions and areas noted in NWCCU's Mid-Cycle guidelines. Such areas were addressed by Eastern Oregon University's formal report and guided the informative conversations of the virtual visit. The visit was conducted remotely through video conference. Consistent with the statement presented during the exit meeting and the on-site visit, this report reflects observations, strengths, and opportunities associated with the mission fulfillment, student achievement, programmatic assessment, and preparatory efforts toward the Year Seven review, and progress on recommendations from the institution's most recent Year Seven evaluation.

Part I: Mission Fulfillment

EOU has made progress in the area of mission fulfillment since its Year Seven evaluation in 2018. The institution has addressed the recommendations made by the Year Seven evaluation team to define mission fulfillment and to more clearly determine what constitutes an acceptable threshold for mission fulfillment. The university has adopted a strategic plan, which is in effect through 2029. The plan, called "The Ascent 2029," outlines six goals with accompanying objectives and KPIs. Each KPI is tracked and examined to determine if it meets a set threshold. Goals 1 (student success/competence and confidence), 2 (transformational education/academic quality), and 3 (number of lives impacted/access, opportunity, and completion) are most closely related to the Mid-Cycle Evaluation.

The institution has created a planning process and data management system in which annual department/program analyses are connected to strategic plan goals and identify progress on KPIs. The institution has also tied budgetary requests to specific elements of the strategic plan. Deans and Department Chairs reported use of the annual analysis in making curricular and program decisions.

The institution provides examples in its report of progress made on strategic plan goals and objectives and specifically those that determine mission fulfillment. These include indicators such as numbers of students participating in experiential learning, sampled students achieving general education and program learning assessment goals, and NSSE-based student self-reports of student-faculty interactions and effective teaching practices.

However, in the majority of cases, the target goals have already been met, far prior to the strategic plan ending date of 2029. This suggests that measures may not be meaningful as currently configured. Further work needs to be done to ensure that indicators are meaningful and the assessments are accurate measures of achievement that lead to actionable results. For example, the student work sampling measure for program and university learning outcomes shows 100% for four years in a row. The general education outcomes have also consistently met or exceeded the target set. Plans are underway to expand the vision for experiential

learning beyond numbers of participants to examine various elements of curricular integration and student learning outcomes tracking. This will help address concerns about reliance on outputs (e.g, numbers) rather than direct measures of learning.

Part II: Student Achievement

EOU has identified mission fulfillment metrics, or a subset of indicators from the strategic plan. These include student achievement metrics from the NSSE, which are compared with similar institutions. Findings are analyzed by the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (CTLA) advisory group and used to inform professional development programming for faculty. Faculty report using the findings to inform department goals and planning. Other mission fulfillment metrics include retention, graduation, high school matriculation, and student diversity percentages.

The university has drawn some conclusions based on these metrics. Progress has been made, for example, in increasing the percentage of culturally and ethnically diverse students, and in fact, the 2029 target has already been exceeded. This is also true in the case of student learning outcomes and for general education, program, and university outcomes. Retention and graduation rates have been identified as areas needing improvement and some work has been done to provide students with tools to plan and track progress to graduation. Some strategic plan indicators do not yet have data or targets set such as supportive environment for faculty and staff and intercultural competency for students.

The report provides limited examples of how tracking the indicators has resulted in decision making, actions, or institutional improvements although it indicates that when KPIs are not achieved, action plans are developed and tied to budget requests. Funding requests reference objectives in the strategic plan, but clarity is needed for how these requests are prioritized and related to mission fulfillment metrics.

To better prepare for Year 7, student achievement data such as retention, completion, and other meaningful categories should be disaggregated by race, gender, ethnicity, SES as described in the Standards. These data must be compared to a more manageable list of peer institutions and be widely and easily accessible.

It is critical for EOU to show evidence of how planning, assessment, benchmarking, and findings related to student achievement are resulting in actions and impact. Student learning indicators must be meaningful and findings from these indicators must be actionable. Consistently meeting targets may be a sign that the appropriate measures or targets have not been identified or need to be changed. Similarly, examples of actions based on Annual Program Reports and Effectiveness Reports should be highlighted.

Part III: Programmatic Assessment

Processes for program assessment involve an Annual Effectiveness Report for non-academic units and an Annual Program Review and 5-Year Longitudinal Program Review for academic programs. Both require linking to strategic plan goals, objectives, and KPIs. The Annual Program Review requires reporting on three strategic plan goals: Goal 1 – Student Success, Goal 2 – Transformational Learning, and Goal 3 – Grow the Number of Lives Impacted. Goal 2 requires reporting on essential learning outcomes. Data for these reports is provided by Institutional Research. Faculty members spoke well of the Institutional Research office and their responsiveness to data requests, but in some cases, they feel that the data provided, particularly external data from EAB, is inadequate or does not reflect what they need. Executive summaries of the Annual Program Review Reports include a narrative, a section on data, insights, and analysis, and goals and actions and are available on the institution's institutional effectiveness website.

Oversight for programmatic assessment has transitioned from the administration to a faculty-led steering committee for the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (CTLA). The AAC&U VALUE rubrics have been adapted to measure University Learning Outcomes and their use appears to be well-supported by faculty. General education outcomes are listed on a website along with assessment cycles for measuring critical thinking, inquiry, communication, and civic engagement. Curricular maps indicate where the general education outcomes are being taught in various courses across disciplines. Program learning outcomes are listed in the academic catalog and in all course syllabi, and also available on EOU's website.

As noted previously, EOU needs to be mindful of targets that are consistently met and examine reasons for this. The CRLA is working on scoring calibration and has identified factors accounting for differences in results such as course levels and delivery modes. The transition of assessment oversight to the CTLA has been welcomed by the faculty; CTLA will be critical in efforts to strengthen learning outcomes achievement. Several examples were shared regarding the value of faculty discussions within and across departments on course-level assessments and resulting insights and actions.

Faculty reported that although a lot of work, the 5-year program reviews, were beneficial. Although not apparent in the report template itself, department chairs reported that the reviews were based on data provided by Institutional Research and involved reflection on annual reviews.

PART IV: Moving Forward

EOU has identified specific plans and priorities for each strategic plan goal. These demonstrate a commitment to on-going improvement. A Center for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging will provide needed student support. The Center for Rural Engagement & Vitality will expand partnerships for experiential learning. The CTLA aims to fully integrate assessment with

professional development programming. In other words, teaching or advising needs identified in program assessments will be addressed with professional development opportunities for faculty. These strategies demonstrate that EOU is moving forward to enhance their current efforts in significant ways.

PART V: Addendums

Recommendation [3]: [Fall 2018 Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability]; [Fully implement and sustain an effective system of evaluation of all its programs and services, wherever offered and however delivered, to evaluate achievement of clearly identified program goals or intended outcomes and evaluate the impacts of program and service changes. (2020 Standard(s) 1.C.5;1.C.7)]

Recommendation [4]: [Fall 2018 Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability]; [Improve core theme assessment and the utilization of assessment data, so that results of core theme assessments and results of assessments of programs and services are completed regularly throughout the accreditation cycle; are consistently used for improvement by informing planning, decision making, and allocation of resources and capacity, for example, fundraising and budget planning; and made available to appropriate constituencies in a timely manner. (2020 Standard(s) 1.B.1)]

In Fall, 2020, EOU responded to Recommendations #3 and #4 from the 2018 Year Seven Evaluation Report and has made further progress on these recommendations since that time. These include improvements in program learning outcomes and General Education assessment approaches and processes, requiring annual reports from both academic and non-academic units that are tied to strategic plan goals, and linking budget requests to the strategic plan.

The strategic plan is being used a framework throughout the university for decision-making, budgeting, and decision making. KPIs at the unit level feed into institutional goals. Assessments are completed regularly and inform improvements. The institution has a strong foundation in place for programmatic assessment, including annual program reviews and 5- year reviews. The transition to the faculty-led CTLA has resulted in greater ownership and commitment to assessment. EOU will need to demonstrate that they are continuously improving which may mean examining strategic plan thresholds and continuing to support and further development all student learning assessment efforts.