Montana State University – Great Falls College of Technology

Focused Interim Report Recommendations 2 – 5

March 2007

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Spring 2007

Introduction

In its Comprehensive Evaluation Report of Spring 2005, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) concluded that Montana State University – Great Falls College of Technology does not meet the criteria for accreditation with respect to institutional effectiveness and its relationship to strategic planning and resource allocation. The Commission requested, in the second of its recommendations, that the College take appropriate action to ensure this recommendation is addressed. The Commission further requested a written progress report by Spring 2007. This section constitutes that report.

Recommendation

Recommendation Two of the Full-Scale Evaluation Committee Report of April 20-22, 2005, for Montana State University- Great Falls College of Technology states:

> The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College develop and implement a clearly articulated plan to assess overall institutional effectiveness. The Committee also recommends that the results of the assessment process be used to inform and direct strategic planning and resource allocation in clearly delineated and demonstrable ways. (Standard 1.B.4; Eligibility Requirement 17 Institutional Effectiveness)

Summary of Progress

Montana State University - Great Falls College of Technology (hereinafter, "the College") has taken major steps to comply with the NWCCU Standards and the specific recommendation noted above. The recommendation suggests action in two areas: (1) the development of a clear written plan for using assessment to improve institutional effectiveness and (2) the use of assessment results to inform and direct planning and resource allocation. The College has made significant progress in each area, as summarized in the two subsections below.

Using Assessment to Improve Institutional Effectiveness

Since the April 2005 Full-Scale Evaluation Committee visit, the College has made significant progress in establishing a mission-centric sustainable campus plan to improve institutional effectiveness through assessment of outcomes at the student, program, and institutional levels. Essentially, the plan is this:

Components of Assessment:

1.) Student Learning Outcomes (Course, Program, General Abilities) and Measures

2.) Departmental/Divisional Outcomes and Measures
3.) Institutional Outcomes and Measures

Process for Assessment

1.) A developmental stage devoted to:
    a. identifying, developing, and articulating outcomes and their measures at all levels – courses, programs, departments, and institution;
    b. developing or gathering benchmark data as defined by the measures above; and
    c. piloting the annual process linking assessment to planning and resource allocation.
2.) With full implementation, an annual assessment process consisting of:
    a. gathering updated data in the benchmarked areas;
    b. assessing the College's effectiveness in meeting our outcomes in order to identify areas where we face challenges or where there is opportunity for further improvement;
    c. developing working plans at all levels to address challenges and opportunities;
    d. connecting work plans to the budget development process; and
    e. allocating resources based on our identification of immediate priorities to address red-flag issues/golden opportunities and our strategies for improvement.

As simple as the plan appears, arriving at a collective understanding of it and institutional commitment to it has been a complex and iterative cycle. We recognize that the plan is in outline form and that we are clearly still in the developmental stage of our institutional assessment process. We believe we will end the developmental phase in Fiscal Year 2008 and have a plan that is far more detailed, refined, and "test-driven" than is possible now. Nonetheless, we now understand and are committed to the destination and have charted a course to get there.

Our journey began in August 2005, when the College's Leadership Team (Attachment 2.A) reviewed the unsuccessful efforts undertaken by the College over the previous decade to establish a clearly stated plan to assess overall institutional effectiveness. These discussions led to the decision to revise the College's existing strategic plan to align with Montana University System planning and outcomes data (Attachment 2.B). The next subsection explains that process and its outcomes more completely.

At the same time, in response to Recommendation One from NWCCU, the Director of Accreditation and Assessment engaged the faculty in the development of student learning outcomes at the programmatic level. By May 2006, the College succeeded in publishing learning outcomes for each degree and certificate program as recommended by NWCCU in April, 2005 (and summarized in our Progress Report on General Recommendation One, October 2006).

Recognizing the need to refine and expand upon the foundation of student learning outcomes, the administration recruited an Outcomes Assessment Team (OAT) in June 2006 to explore the Alverno model of outcomes assessment. The Alverno conference was a crucial point in our journey. At the conference, OAT collaborated with experienced Alverno faculty during a two-day consultation to establish foundational goals and develop an initial timeline for outcomes assessment efforts (See Attachment 2.C). Most importantly, our Outcomes Assessment Team returned with a vision and a commitment to outcomes assessment that have driven the planning process since then. Examples of OAT's early activities upon returning from Alverno follow:

- OAT briefed administration on the Alverno training, proposed a course of action for the year to come, and secured administrative support;
- OAT met with Leadership Team to outline a course of action and an initial timeline for an interactive process that would support a long-term commitment to a dynamic assessment plan.
- Individually, the three members of OAT met with faculty colleagues by department to garner interest and support. This endeavor took the remainder of the summer months 2006.
- Prior to Fall Semester 2006, a one-day faculty retreat was held to discuss outcomes assessment. This retreat included three colleagues from Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) who were also working with Alverno College to develop their institutional assessment plan. Our FVCC colleagues shared their progress and experiences with the MSU GF COT faculty. The retreat culminated with our faculty identifying eight abilities, or competencies, as the foundation for learning outcomes assessment. (See Attachment 2.D)

This level of focused activity has continued throughout the last year, as the following key events illustrate:

- The Associate Dean of Instruction and Assessment has conducted a series of workshops to provide faculty with the foundation of assessment and to develop the specifics of the plan for the eight abilities. The goal was to garner the necessary support to establish a sustainable institutional assessment plan. Attachment 2.E delineates the schedule of faculty workshops.

- Faculty members established the meaning of assessment, defined outcomes, identified criteria, and explored public comparisons. This process resulted in a collective commitment to assessment and a culture of improvement in the three academic departments (Arts and Sciences, Health Sciences, and Business and Technology), in the co-curricular areas, and among professional staff.

- As a community, the campus created a Commitment to Assessment Statement. (Attachment 2.F)

- Based on the work of Dr. Peggy Maki, and outlined in her book, *Assessing for Learning: Building a Sustainable Commitment Across the Institution*, a template for a structured timeline and program assessment strategy was adopted by all the academic departments. (Attachments 2.G-H)

- As a result of this growing understanding of and commitment to outcomes assessment, the learning outcomes created and published in the 2006-2007 Academic Catalog have been revised to be more consistent and clear.

- Operational definitions for goals, objectives, outcomes and measures have been created. (Attachment 2.I)

- Process descriptions and instructional materials have been developed and distributed to faculty.

- To further advance the expectations for the programmatic and departmental student learning assessment initiative, each department and program began in January 2007 to develop a first cycle of assessment and began collecting data. The strategy and timeline scaffolded the processes.

While the faculty have been immersed in outcomes assessment at the student learning level, the Leadership Team has engaged in discussions and activities at the institutional level. Simply stated, these Leadership Team discussions and activities have addressed the question, “How can we evaluate whether our mission is being achieved?”

Through ongoing discussions at the leadership level, the College identified mission-centric performance metrics (Attachment 3.B-D) that would be the basis for an annual assessment driving both strategic and operational activities, as well as the allocation of resources. After articulating these metrics, the College undertook the work of developing benchmark data, at the institutional as well as the departmental levels, to assess our effectiveness in these areas. This data needs to be refined and expanded, but it does represent the foundation on which we will measure discrete and collective performance for FY08.

In short, the College has completed Steps 1(a) and 1(b) in the developmental stage of our institutional assessment plan and will complete the final step, the piloting of the assessment process, by the end of this fiscal year. That pilot process, along with the activities that led to it, is described in the next subsection.

Using Assessment Results to Drive Planning and Resource Allocations

Initially, our efforts in planning and resource allocation were conducted independently of institutional assessment. In fact, because of the limited level of assessment at the College in 2005 and the even more limited results, planning and resource allocation had to be conducted independently at that time.

In late 2005, our Leadership Team conducted the analysis and discussions which led to the revision of our five-year strategic plan. (Attachment 2.B) Using data on enrollment, retention, access, and affordability provided by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to the Office of the Commissioner of Higher

Education, the Leadership Team intentionally aligned its strategic planning initiatives with those of the Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education.

As described in greater detail in the Response to Recommendation 3, we also developed a budget process in 2005-2006 that was aligned with the strategic plan and was more inclusive and fully communicated campus-wide.

As the institutional awareness of and commitment to outcomes assessment grew, we found it impossible to continue the planning and budget activities as functions independent of assessment. Thus, we have had to return to the strategic plan and budget process developed in 2005-2006 and refine them to reflect our intent to use a results-based approach to planning and budgeting. We view that as a positive step – and a necessary one for the pilot process described below to have meaning.

Beginning late in 2006 through early 2007, the College's Leadership Team engaged in a series of meetings with the following results:

- institutional performance metrics were adopted;
- the institutional assessment and budget development process was institutionalized;
- benchmark data was presented; and
- the FY08 institutional planning and budget development process was launched.

Shortly thereafter, the individual or individuals responsible for each programmatic area or department with a dedicated budget were provided two institutional documents to aid in working through the new process. The first was a budget development worksheet (example given in Attachment 3.F) for that specific area that listed a five-year historical expenditure report, program-generated FTE and enrollment (if an academic department)/ institutional FTE and enrollment (if a co-curricular department), areas for FY08 projected budgetary needs, and expense justification. Where appropriate, these justifications were to be linked back to program/departmental plans for improving effectiveness over the next year. (A sample departmental assessment and goal-setting report is included as Attachment 2.J)

The second was a synopsis of program or department measures of effectiveness (example given in Attachment 3.G). This synopsis was comprised primarily of data gathered from overall institutional effectiveness measured against the College's performance metrics, and then delineated specifically for a department – most commonly program enrollment, FTE, graduate numbers, retention rates, etc. It needs to be noted that these metrics have worked well for academic programs and departments, but for co-curricular areas, other program/department outcomes and measures will need to be developed and assessed to better gauge particular effectiveness. Some departments have already established these and have utilized them in the planning process for FY08. These examples will be used as a model for other areas as the institutional assessment activities progress in upcoming years.

Upon receipt of these documents, department heads were given the opportunity to meet with members of the College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee (CPBAC) to delve deeper into the data, answer questions concerning budgetary expenditures and classifications, and work through the newly implemented process of inter-relating budget development and institutional effectiveness. While these sessions were optional, nearly every single department participated, illustrating the collective commitment that the College's stakeholders have in the new process.

At the time this report was being prepared, the College was mid-way through the planning and budget development process linked to outcomes assessment. Each program/department has had the opportunity to review data relevant to their operational effectiveness, evaluate historical expenditures, and project their budgetary needs for FY08. Each department has also developed and submitted goals and objectives for FY08 representing areas of work or need related to maintaining or improving their area's effectiveness as it pertains to the overall institutional effectiveness measured by the College's performance metrics. Where applicable, these two items are linked through justification statements illustrating the need for resources to meet goals and objectives.

The remainder of the process is being carried out through the collaborative adjudication of the appropriate balance between the available resources and the needs and opportunities related to progress-toward-mission. This adjudication is being facilitated by the College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee and is anticipated to be completed by April 2007.

The College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee (CPBAC) is the hub of the integrated process of planning, assessment, and resource allocation at Montana State University – Great Falls College of Technology. It is a process in its pilot phase as we write. However, we are confident that this time, we will get to our destination.

Next Steps

This response began with a basic plan for an approach to institutional assessment that would drive strategic planning and resource allocation. We close with the steps that will take this plan to the full implementation stage within the next two years.

- Our efforts in the developmental stage have been on identifying and measuring the foundational and capstone outcomes, or student learning and institutional outcomes respectively. To connect the two and to provide a bridge for the assessment of the institution's overall effectiveness, the College will develop departmental outcomes and measures of effectiveness for specific to co-curricular areas.

  The performance metrics used this year have worked well for the Business and Technology and Health Sciences academic departments, which have clearly defined degree/certificate programs. For the Arts and Sciences (general and related education) and co-curricular areas, alternative program/department outcomes and measures will need to be developed and assessed to better gauge their individual effectiveness.

For example, prior to 2006 the Arts and Sciences Department had recognized programs (the Associate of Arts, the Associate of Science, and the University System Core). However, the available outcomes helped the department to identify issues specific to their mission and purpose, issues that were different from our workforce preparation programs. These issues included correctly coding students for their educational goals, helping them complete and transcript one of these credentials before they transfer, and/or getting them to change programs formally as they move from undecided status to a specific degree/certificate program. So while the data revealed work needing to be done to better serve and track students, specific goals leading to these ends had to be developed. Examples like this one from Arts and Sciences, linking benchmark data to goal-setting and strategies for improvement, will be used as a model for other areas as the institutional assessment activities progress in upcoming years.

- The intertwined nature of assessment, planning, and resource allocation raises the assessment of institutional effectiveness to a top priority. Our skills and processes for engaging in this assessment must also be steadily improved. We will send more faculty and staff to the Alverno conference in 2007, continue to learn from other two-year colleges, and seek out other opportunities for professional development in this area.

- As our benchmarked data broadens in scope and deepens in use, we expect to see steady refinement of the processes established in the last year. Indeed, we have already seen refinements even at the pilot stage, as noted in the Arts and Sciences example above.

- As described more fully in the response to Recommendation 3, the College has established an integrated process tying assessment to strategic planning and resource allocation. The pilot process has helped our planning process and results create a stronger focus on planning in all areas of the College. Ensuring that the results of these department and division plans are assessed annually and drive further planning must become part of the way we "do business." A major factor in achieving that business practice is resource allocation that is clearly and consistently tied to what the data tells us we have achieved and must (or might) yet achieve. In other words, we must stay the course, and resource allocation is where the rubber meets the road.

Conclusion

In the past twelve years, attempts to move outcomes assessment forward at MSU-GF COT progressed at irregular intervals, marked by fragmented and disconnected efforts. The end result was that the full cycle of assessment was never fully executed. In the early phases of the assessment effort, the campus community viewed assessment as a "one-shot deal" instead of a continuous cycle of assessment for improvement. Without the commitment to assessment, our institution was unable to use results to drive planning and resource allocation.

The College has made good progress in developing an institutional assessment plan with processes in place for assessment of outcomes evaluated through their measures at the student, program, departmental, and institutional levels. Through this work, College leaders have realized that a product of the assessment process is the identification of strategies for the future and compelling justifications for resource allocation. The foundation of assessment is now placed into a context that can move the institution forward to foster institutional change.

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Summary of Progress on General Recommendation Three
Spring 2007

Introduction

In its Comprehensive Evaluation Report of Spring 2005, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) concluded that Montana State University – Great Falls College of Technology (hereinafter, "the College") does not meet the criteria for accreditation with respect to the development of guidelines and parameters for budgetary development and implementation which are clearly defined, widely promulgated, and adhered to by all constituencies of the College. The Commission requested, in the third of its recommendations, that the College take appropriate action to ensure these criteria are met. The Commission further requested a written progress report on this recommendation by Spring 2007. This section constitutes that report.

Recommendation

Recommendation 3 of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities in its Comprehensive Evaluation Report of Spring 2005 states:

> The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College develop guidelines and parameters for budgetary development and implementation which are clearly defined, widely promulgated and adhered to by all constituencies of the College. These guidelines should include an opportunity for initial budget input and requests and a process whereby stakeholders are informed of the various stages of budget development. (Standard 7.A.3)

Basis for Recommendation

The report confirmed that the College's financial affairs are generally managed in accordance with sound practices. While resources are adequate at a maintenance level, they will be strained by additional growth unless accompanied by new revenue. The narrow margin of operation produced by this growth elevates long-term financial planning to the level of strategic importance. The report noted that the College had exerted considerable effort to create a budget development process that is visible and transparent, but the process was not widely understood in the campus community.

Background

Prior to noting the progress the College has made, it may be helpful to outline the budget development processes of the State of Montana and the Montana State University System, both of which supersede the College's processes. It may also be helpful to reiterate the College's own internal budget development process prior to the Commission's 2005 visit and subsequent recommendations.

Historically, the College's internal budgeting process has been driven by a multi-year planning model and the College's Strategic Plan. The annual budget gathered information from the various areas and departments in the timeline presented in the College's self study. It was then submitted to the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education for presentation to the Board of Regents for approval. The College's biennial budget was developed by the Dean's Operations Committee (now known as the Dean's Cabinet) but submitted to Board of Regents and subsequently to the Governor's Office for executive processing before being presented as part of the budget for the Montana University System to the legislature, which ultimately allocates state funds for education.

The Montana legislature meets every two years to build a state budget for the upcoming biennium. Montana Board of Regents' policy requires each campus to present its long-term budget plan for Regent approval. Therefore, each campus is required to submit its long-range building plans, enrollment projections, and proposed budget to the Montana Board of Regents somewhere between six months and one year before the legislature meets. The Montana State University campuses' plans are consolidated at the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) and presented to the Board of Regents for approval, somewhere between three and six months before the legislature meets. Once approved, plans for building requests are then sent to the Governor's Long-Range Building Plan Committee and the general budget information is sent to Governor's Office of Budget and Planning (OBP).

The Montana University System's (MUS) budget development process is twofold; one stage is for the biennial budget development, which is submitted to the Governor's OBP, and the second stage is for the annual budgets of each campus, reflecting the legislated allocations and the Regents' allocation model. Both budgets, biennial and annual, are submitted to and approved by the Board of Regents before going on to the next appropriate step.

Summary of Responsive Efforts

Upon receiving the recommendation to improve our budget development process, the College strategically implemented a planned approach for responding not only to the Commission's Recommendation 3, but also to the integration of budget development and assessing institutional effectiveness in response to NWWCU's Recommendation 2. While this progress report focuses primarily on the budget development process, because the College has taken great pains to ensure the two processes go hand in hand, much of the information provided hereinafter will refer to both systems. The chronology of our efforts to date is provided in Attachment 3.A.

Fiscal Year 2007 (July 2006-June 2007) Budget

Shortly after the Commission's visit and following the release of recommendations, the College began the budget-setting process for its Fiscal Year 2007 budget. As mentioned in the background, the State of Montana requires the College to establish a two-year projected budget in alignment with the State's biennial budget (established during the 2005 legislative session), and FY07 represented the second year in this timeframe. However, the College was eager to initiate changes based on the Commission's recommendations.

The initial step in this direction was the expansion of the College's budget committee. In the past the committee was comprised of top-level administrators, various academic department chairs/division heads, and finance staff. During the FY07 budget-setting process, membership was expanded to include those individuals as well as the representatives from co-curricular areas, such as Outreach and Distance Learning, to provide more comprehensive representation of the College's constituencies.

At the same time, a first draft of the College's budget development plan (Attachment 3.B) was created to provide guidance to the newly expanded budget development committee. This plan outlined the procedural steps for the budget development process and a timeline in which each step would occur, so that all stakeholders were informed of the various stages in the process and able to track which stage the College was in at any time.

Some departments used standardized forms to initiate the development of budget projections for FY07. For example, the individuals within the Outreach Department who were ultimately responsible for a program budget utilized a form to provide input and record their budget needs for the upcoming year. In other departments, this process was handled though departmental meetings, where projections were collectively worked on in concert with all individuals responsible for a program or area budget.

The aggregation of departmental budget projections collected from these activities resulted in the first draft of the FY07 institutional budget. In compliance with the budget development process and to take advantage of a learning opportunity, the Assistant Dean of Administration and Finance (CFO), working with the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs (CAO), conducted work sessions with departments to illustrate the budget processes from an institutional, holistic viewpoint, while at the same time working to resolve the variance between projected expenditures and anticipated income.

These activities culminated in a budget for FY07 that was better understood and supported by the academic departments. Monitoring of budget activities has been handled through monthly reports provided to department/division heads and disseminated from there to all responsible stakeholders. While many stakeholders contributed to and felt committed to the budget process as a result, other individuals and departments were not as connected to the process and thus less invested in the final product.

Although the initial budget development plan included reference to both the strategic plan initiatives and individual department goals and objectives, the only one of those considered when evaluating budget requests was the projected impact on meeting strategic plan activities. The College regarded this as a step in the right direction, but recognized that a more integrated model for the allocation of resources to increase institutional effectiveness was needed to fully address the Commission's concerns.

Fiscal Year 2008 (July 2007-June 2008) Budget

Encouraged by the improvements in the Fiscal Year 2007 process, the College once again undertook modifications to the budget development process in the planning of the Fiscal Year 2008 budget, with the goal of implementing performance-based budgeting as part of the overall assessment of institutional effectiveness. The College began the process by using institutional effectiveness to drive the allocation of resources that would ensure the College's success in the upcoming year.

Two initiatives drove this part of the assessment and budget evolution at the College. The first was the identification of institutional outcomes, or rather the performance metrics (Attachment 3.C) derived from the College's mission that would be assessed annually to drive strategic and operational activities, as well as the allocation of resources. After articulating these metrics, the College undertook the work of developing benchmark data, at the institutional and departmental levels, to assess the College's effectiveness in these areas. This data will be refined and expanded, but it is the foundation on which the College will measure discrete and collective performance for FY08. The establishment of this foundation is a major institutional achievement.

The second initiative was the redevelopment of the College's Institutional Planning, Assessment & Budget Process (Attachment 3.D). Building on the processes that worked well in FY07, as well as successful components of the development process from previous years, the refined process better integrated the strategic planning activities, annual goals and objectives, and budget development/resource allocation processes to increase the College's institutional effectiveness.

These activities were the catalyst for the transition of the College's Institutional Effectiveness and Budget Committees into the College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee (CPBAC). The membership of this committee is included in Attachment 3.E. This committee is charged throughout the process with:

- communicating the process to the campus stakeholders;
- gathering and interpreting institutional data to evaluate performance;
- collecting and aggregating budget projections, as well as strategic and operational goals and objectives; and
- working with the College's leadership to allocate resources strategically to the institution's various departments and programs.

Beginning late in 2006 through early 2007, various presentations and work sessions were conducted with the College's Leadership Team where institutional performance metrics were adopted, the institutional assessment and budget development process was institutionalized, benchmark data was presented, and the FY08 institutional planning and budget development process was launched. Shortly thereafter, the individual or individuals responsible for each programmatic area or department with a dedicated budget were provided two institutional documents to aid in working through the new process.

The first was a budget development worksheet (example given in Attachment 3.F) for each specific area that listed a five-year historical expenditure report, program-generated FTE and Enrollment (if an academic department)/institutional FTE and Enrollment (if a co-curricular department), and areas for FY08 projected budgetary needs and expense justification. Where appropriate, these justifications were linked back to program/departmental plans for improving effectiveness over the next year.

The second was a synopsis of the program's or department's measures of effectiveness (example given in Attachment 3.G). This was comprised primarily of data gathered from overall institutional effectiveness measured against the College's performance metrics and subsequently delineated specifically for a department – most commonly program enrollment, FTE, graduate numbers, retention rates, etc. These metrics have worked well for the Business and Technology and Health Sciences academic departments, which have clearly defined degree/certificate programs. For the Arts and Sciences (general and related education) and co-curricular areas, alternative program/department outcomes and measures will need to be developed and assessed to better gauge their individual effectiveness. Some departments have already established these and have utilized them in the planning process for FY08.

Upon receipt of these two documents, department heads were given the opportunity to meet with members of the CPBAC to delve deeper into the data, answer questions concerning budgetary expenditures and classifications, and to work through the newly implemented process of bringing budget development and institutional effectiveness together. While these sessions were optional, nearly every department participated in these sessions, illustrating the commitment the College's stakeholders have to the new process.

At the time this report was being prepared, the College was mid-way through the planning and budget development process. Each program/department has had the opportunity to review data relevant to its operational effectiveness, evaluate historical expenditures, and project budgetary needs for FY08. Each department has also developed and submitted goals and objectives for FY08 representing areas of work or need affecting their ability to maintain or improve their department's effectiveness, and in turn improve overall institutional effectiveness, as measured by the College's performance metrics. Where applicable, these two items are linked through justification statements illustrating the need for the resource to meet goals and objectives.

The remainder of the process is being carried out through the collaborative adjudication of the appropriate balance between available resources and the needs and opportunities that will advance the College in its mission. That adjudication is being facilitated by the College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee and is anticipated to be completed by April 2007.

Positive Outcomes

The efforts Montana State University – Great Falls College of Technology has undertaken in the last two years to address Recommendation 3 have produced several very positive outcomes. These include:

- Improved communication among all stakeholders through the budget development process;
- Clarification of the budget development process and timelines;
- Inclusive involvement in all stages of the budget development process leading towards collective commitment to the budget;
- Comprehensive and representative committee structure on the College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee;
- Anticipated increase in Return on Investment (ROI) by utilizing Performance Based Budgeting principles; and
- The integration of institutional planning, assessment and resource allocation.

Next Steps

The College is pleased with the progress made towards implementing a sound budget development process that is communicated to all the College's stakeholders, inclusive of all constituencies in a meaningful way, and connected to institutional effectiveness and assessment. Although this progress has inspired a campus-wide engagement and commitment, it is not a completed project. We know that our budget process will undergo considerable fine-tuning in the years to come. Various areas of work have been identified and require our attention for the near future, including:

- Mentioned previously, the State of Montana's budget process requires long-term projections from campuses well in advance of budget finalization. For example, the budget development process for the state's 2008/2009 biennial budget began in 2006 with the College submitting initial projections for those two years. However, the budget for this biennium will not be finalized until the legislature approves it in the spring of 2007.

  Understanding these constraints, the College will expand on the current process to allow the entire campus community to participate in the projection of a biennial budget that aligns with a strategic plan of the same duration.

- The College has made good progress in developing an institutional assessment plan with processes in place for assessment of outcomes evaluated through their measures at the student, program, departmental, and institutional levels. (Refer to progress report on Recommendation 2 for more information.) Through this work, College leaders have realized that a product of the assessment process is the identification of strategies the institution will need to employ to capitalize on opportunities and improve effectiveness. These findings will become the short-term and strategic plans for the institution and solidify a grass-roots approach to strategic planning.

Therefore, the College will continue to improve the budget development and planning process to allow for better development and integration of the long-term strategic plan as well as the short-term operational plans (goals and objectives) with the allocation of resources both in the immediate and projected budgets.

- As a growing institution, the College has recognized that the informal communication strategies of the past need to be modified to allow for the cascading of important information to all of the College's constituents. Therefore, the College will continue to evaluate and assess the impacts of the new planning and budget development process by monitoring of budgetary compliance and seeking feedback from the College's stakeholders as to the process's effectiveness and improvement.

- To provide better understanding, continuity and commitment, especially at the program and department levels, and to encourage fiscal responsibility in the budget development and monitoring process, the College will provide further education of stakeholders concerning generic budgeting processes. These activities will include promoting general awareness as to how specific types of budget requests are made (e.g. requests for equipment expenditures) and best practices on how expenditures are monitored.

Concluding Statement

The development of Montana State University – Great Falls College of Technology's annual budget has evolved into a "grass-roots" or "bottom-up" process, in which the Dean and her Cabinet are responsible, first, for ensuring that representatives of the College community have an opportunity to participate in a more proactive role, and second, for eventually balancing institutional needs and constituent requests against the funds available. This process is facilitated by the new College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee. Each year, this process will continue to be reviewed and revised as needed to build on institutional values and budget principles that are continually evaluated, evolving, and guided by the overarching mission of the College and those priorities and strategic goals established by the College, the Montana University System, and the Montana Board of Regents.

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Summary of Progress on General Recommendation Four
Spring 2007

Introduction

In its Comprehensive Evaluation Report of Spring 2005, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities concluded that Montana State University – Great Falls College of Technology does not meet the criteria for accreditation with respect to academic advising. The Evaluation Committee recommended that the College develop and implement a systematic, effective, and equitable approach to academic student advisement. (Standard 2.C.5, 3.D.10). The Commission requested, in the fourth of its recommendations, that the College take appropriate action to ensure that these deficiencies are addressed within the prescribed two-year period. The Commission further requested a written progress report on this recommendation by Spring 2007. This document constitutes that report.

Recommendation

Recommendation 4 of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities in its Comprehensive Evaluation Report of Spring 2005 states:

> The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College develop and implement a systematic, effective, and equitable approach to academic student advisement. (Standard 2.C.5, 3.D.10)

The Commission's standards referenced in the recommendation:

Standard 2.C.5: *The institution designs and maintains effective academic advising programs to meet student needs for information and advice and adequately informs and prepares faculty and other personnel responsible for the advising function.*

Standard 3.D.10: *A systematic program of academic and other educational program advisement is provided. Advisors help students make appropriate decisions concerning academic choices and career paths. Specific advisor responsibilities are defined, published, and made available to students. Career counseling and placement services are consistent with student needs and institutional mission.*

Summary of Basis for Recommendations

The concerns expressed in the April 2005 Evaluation Committee Report related to advisement were as follows:

- Consistent opportunities for customer evaluation of student programs and services should be facilitated.
- The Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventories in 2000, 2002, and 2004 indicate substantial student dissatisfaction with advising.

- The College has not developed an advising model that represents an equitable balance between providing students with accurate academic direction and recognizing the impact on faculty with pre-existing workload.
- Though faculty are required to provide student advising as part of their contractual workload, there is considerable variation in the approach and level of quality of that advising.
- The advising load for faculty varies greatly by program and within programs/departments.

Summary of Responsive Efforts

Since the 2005 Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities' accreditation visit, Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology (hereinafter, "the College") has worked to improve its advising processes, from entry advising when students first decide to go to college through to graduation and/or transfer as they leave the College. In the fall of 2005 a collaborative team of faculty and Student Services staff invited two National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) consultants to campus to help the College identify areas of strength and weakness in advisement. Following the consultants' visit, the College team mapped out plans to address identified weaknesses.

The College is confident that it has made significant progress toward a strong advising process. Faculty and students both have tools explaining all steps in the advising process, the orientation and registration processes have been improved, and faculty have attended several workshops on various advising topics. Understanding that progress has been made but much remains to be done, the College has set structures in place that should provide continual assessment and improvement of advisement across the campus.

Need for consistent opportunities for customer evaluation of student programs and services

The College has a regular routine of surveying students formally with the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) every two years. While this instrument is an excellent measure of student satisfaction with programs and services across the campus, it is not an in-depth measure of the items it surveys. The College generates comparison reports and graphs each year that the SSI is given so that progress or decline can be easily tracked. To gain in-depth knowledge of advising, in Fall 2005 another instrument was used to investigate student satisfaction with advisement, using an instrument available through the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) called the Academic Advising Inventory. The Student Services unit of the College plans to continue to use this instrument in alternating years with the SSI, as the NACADA survey provides much more in-depth assessment information that can be used to ensure that the advising program at the College continues to address student needs.

In Fall 2006, the Student Services unit also conducted a student focus group aimed at assessing student satisfaction with and benefit from the admission, orientation, and registration processes. Though this particular focus group was lightly attended, it did yield some helpful information about the orientation and registration processes that was immediately used to strengthen the SOAR (Student Orientation, Advising, and Registration) process. Because of the helpfulness of this focus group process, other programming areas in Student Services plan to use focus groups to assess and improve their areas. At the time this report was written, the Retention, Financial Aid, and Disability Services areas are all in the planning stages of some type of focus group or combination of a focus group and student survey particular to their areas.

With the established routine of using the Student Satisfaction Inventory every other year, and the addition now of the NACADA Academic Advising Inventory in alternating years, the College should have a clear picture of progress or deterioration of the advisement process in place from the students' points of view. Work remains to be done to routinely assess the internal advisement issues to do with faculty workload, communication between Student Services and faculty vis-a-vis transfer advisement, and evaluation of advising as part of faculty contractual responsibilities.

The Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory's indication of student dissatisfaction with advising in the 2000, 2002, and 2004 Inventories

Overall, the Spring 2007 Student Satisfaction Inventory yielded extremely positive results (Attachments 4.A-C). The gap between students' perceived importance of the various measures and students' satisfaction with the same measures was smaller than the gap in 2004 on nearly every question in the Inventory. In every area, the College scored better than the national community and junior college comparison group as well. These results are excellent news for the campus community, and affirm the various efforts at improvement across the board. That is not to say that academic advising has reached the level that would be reflected in the even higher scores the College desires. Two of the seven questions on the SSI still have gaps between importance and satisfaction that are either over or close to a full point. Any measure that has a gap of that magnitude is of concern, and these two require further attention and inquiry.

The two items are:

1) My academic advisor is knowledgeable about the transfer requirements of other schools.
2) The school does whatever it can to help me reach my educational goals.

The SSI indicates areas of concern, but does not give the institution detailed information as to the specific problems students might be encountering. For example, the first item listed above is one that is readily understandable, but the second item is less clear. This is an area that the institution will need to investigate soon, before this group of students moves on, using focus groups or surveys.

The areas in reference to academic advising and counseling that deserve special mention here because they document significant progress from the 2004 survey are:

1) Counseling staff care about students as individuals.

2) My academic advisor is approachable.

The story the SSI tells of advisement over the years at MSU-Great Falls is instructive. In 2000, students were quite happy with all measured areas; in 2002 and 2004, all measured items deteriorated significantly (five of seven and four of seven respectively were over the one-point critical point). In 2007 the College seems to be back to the 200 level of satisfaction, if not better than that level. As one of the consistent measures being used by the College, the historic reference can help the institution step back to analyze the reasons behind the significant differences in student satisfaction with advisement over time.

The College has not developed an advising model that represents an equitable balance between providing students with accurate academic direction and recognizing the impact on faculty with preexisting workload. And, the advising load for faculty varies greatly by program.

A team that included faculty from each department and Student Services attended the first National Academic Advising Association's (NACADA) drive-in conference in Montana to explore resources to address this recommendation. The conference led the team to invite NACADA consultants Peggy King and Tim Champarde to Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology in October of 2005 to assist with devising a plan for development of an advising model for the College (Attachments 4.D-F). They identified the following strengths related to the College's advisement process. The main avenue used by the consulting team was focus groups that included all internal constituencies of the College:

- Committed, passionate faculty and staff
- Basic structure of a Total Intake Model of entry advising
- Initial advising process is student centered
- Fall Bridge program and Introduction to College course
- The advising team in Student Services
- The Dean's roots in Arts and Sciences
- Associate Dean's leadership over both academic and student services

The key issues King and Champarde identified as in need of change or improvement were:

- The Total Intake Model needs customization to meet MSUGF's needs
- Communication issues
- Inadequate staffing
- Lack of policy and definition of advising
- Inequitable assignment of advisees
- Needs assessment
- Lack of coordination of advising
- Staff and faculty development

Out of this assessment, King and Champarde, along with a team of nearly twenty faculty and Student Services staff and the Associate Dean, established recommendations for action:

- Develop an advising mission and definition
- Designate an Advising Coordinator
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of advisors (both faculty and staff)
- Communicate campus-wide
- Conduct a needs assessment with students
- Design a consistent flow using the Total Intake Model as a framework
- Refine the process of students getting their registration PINs
- Identify communication issues and create solutions
- Ensure inclusiveness
- Collaborate on targets for advising seminars

To address several of the action items, the team decided that the College would benefit from the creation of advising handbooks (for students and for faculty), creation of consistent program advising worksheets that will help all parties keep better track of a student's path to their degree or certificate; diversification of the advising delivery systems to include telephone, Web, individual, small group and large group advising and orientation sessions; and professional involvement in NACADA to keep the institution abreast of the state of knowledge in advising. As the planning and implementation developed, the team of faculty and Student Services staff focused on actions to move the institution forward on all of the recommendations.

The faculty/staff team that worked on advising issues included the Associate Dean; the department chairs of Arts and Sciences, Business and Technology, and Health Sciences; faculty from all three departments; the Career and Transfer Advisor; the New Student Advisor; the Disability Services Coordinator; the Retention Counselor; Director of Distance Education; the Tech Prep Coordinator; the Director of Instruction; and the Registrar. The Associate Dean took on the role of Advising Coordinator (though this role has since been passed on to the new Assistant Dean for Student Services), and the group worked to address each of the recommendations.

One of the first actions was to survey students to find out more about what their experience with and satisfaction of advising was at the College. The survey is one developed and used widely through NACADA called the Academic Advising Inventory (AAI). The Inventory was conducted in January of 2006 and respondents included 647 (62.2%) students. Extensive data was developed from the AAI that confirmed the directions the College team was pursuing (Attachments 4.G-I). Because of this first experience with the instrument and the fact that the student body changes from year to year, the team also recommended it be used in every year the College does not survey students with the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory so that each year's students get a chance to contribute to the improvement of advising.

The results of the Academic Advising Inventory were not shared widely at the time of the survey. Key findings that will be watched over time, however, include the following:

- Most of the advising students reported receiving was focused on picking classes and registering.
- Most advising sessions did not include discussion of the student's personal situation or goals.
- 37% of the students are generally dissatisfied with the advising they receive
- 30% of the students say they have received inaccurate information

Work began immediately on putting together both a student and a faculty advising handbook. The handbooks include a mission statement, clearly defined roles and responsibilities of students and advisors, resources for advising, academic support, counseling issues, and a flow-chart to illustrate the entire process of academic advising. Both publications were finalized and disseminated beginning with fall semester 2006. The Student Advising and Resource Handbook was printed and distributed to all new students, including distance students. Copies were provided to all of the faculty advisors to distribute to the continuing students. All advising faculty were provided a copy of the new Advising Manual for Faculty at the beginning of fall semester 2006 during a workshop hosted by the Associate Dean. Both publications are now available on the College's web site (Attachments 4.J-K).

Changes were made to the Total Intake Model for new students. The name of the initial process was changed from ACE to SOAR (Student Orientation, Advising, and Registration) and the sessions are now offered at earlier date prior to the new semester to allow students to register for classes and adjust their lives well in advance of the start of classes. The SOAR sessions are flexible for student schedules and needs and consistent for staff advisors leading the sessions. A PowerPoint presentation is in place now as well as a syllabus for the SOAR program to make the program and outcomes consistent and very user-friendly for advisors. The College's Bozeman satellite uses the system as well as various Great Falls campus staff advisors who use it for small groups and telephone sessions with distance students. A next step for the program is to make SOAR forms available on the Web as a further aid to advising distance students (Attachments 4.L-M).

A student focus group was held in Fall 2006 to mine student input regarding the SOAR sessions, registration and admission processes, and the advice new students receive and retain. While the focus group was small, the information gained was helpful. Unexpectedly, one of the key items learned was that the larger group SOAR sessions were more helpful and comprehensive than the smaller or individual sessions. The students indicated that they learned from other students' questions and the leaders of the sessions may have been more focused on being complete with the larger groups. This information helped inform some changes that will be made to the SOAR sessions for summer and fall 2007, and also gave staff advisors the confirmation they needed to maintain and encourage students to attend the larger group sessions for spring 2007 and subsequent intakes (Attachment 4.N).

Placement into classes in English and mathematics on the basis of standardized test scores has been a practice at the College for some time. In Fall 2006 the College began using the Compass instead of the Asset test. The Compass has allowed the use of a standardized measure of a writing sample (Compass E-Write) that is hoped to provide better placement advice for writing classes than the Asset did. The use of placement tests is a very clear and understandable process at the College. Scores are set by the faculty and placement testing and advising is largely done by Student Services advisors. Montana is also in a system-wide process of standardizing the outcomes for the college-level writing course available at all campuses and transferrable to all campuses. At Montana State University - Great Falls College of Technology, the college-level writing course is English 121. Standardization of outcomes means that placement advice for that course also has to be aligned with other institutions in the state. English placement cut-score adjustments were made beginning with Spring 2007 intake of students. While it is too early to tell what effect this standardization will have on English courses at the College, the aligning of college-level writing courses is generally viewed as a positive development for students who transfer within the Montana University System.

As an open-admission designated campus, students are allowed to be admitted to the College through the first week of classes. With new students coming in, staff advisors generally have gone to individual advising appointments for intake advising for each new student who begins after classes start. This practice slowed the process down for students, further delaying their already late start in classes. Advising staff created a new process they will use beginning with summer 2007. New students will continue to participate in the valuable group intake sessions for the first week of classes so that students will enter their classes earlier than past practice allowed. Further changes in processes include allowing web-based adding and dropping of classes for the first week of classes. This practice is anticipated to further ease the earlier entry of new students into their classes than the past practice of obtaining signatures from each faculty member allowed, and it will also provide time for students to participate in group advising and registration sessions.

An Academic Advising Update was instituted by Student Services beginning Fall Semester 2006 to make important advising information available in one location for faculty and staff advisors (Attachment 4.O). This tool is emailed to all faculty advisors and posted on the College's Intranet to be available at the click of a mouse button as needed. The Update includes any new information from any sector of the College that might impact advising, such as changes to placement rules for classes, financial aid information, new courses that might be of interest to students, important dates and deadlines, etc. The Update will be reviewed and updated each semester, posted, and emailed to faculty every semester prior to the main advising period.

In-service workshops have been offered for faculty during their Faculty Orientation and Advising (FOA) days leading up to each semester. In Fall 2006 a general advising session was put on by the faculty/staff team that put the advising handbooks together. This team rolled out the Handbooks and provided a work session on how to use the tools, an overview of the whole advising process and flow, and the opportunity to discuss advising in general. Prior to Spring 2007 FOA Days, Student Service staff surveyed faculty to see what advising topics were of interest to them in order to collaborate on targets of interest to the faculty. This system worked very well and sessions were held on Advising Underprepared Students, and Advising Students Transferring on to Other Institutions. Both sessions were well-attended and faculty and Student Services staff engaged in active discussion on both topics. This practice will continue, as it seemed to fit faculty needs well. It also provided very positive environments for faculty and staff to understand their interdependency in the advising enterprise on campus (Attachments 4.P-Q).

One of the bigger issues that may continue to be problematic, but is being actively worked on, is the advising workload for faculty. This issue, while common to both the Arts and Sciences and the Health Sciences departments, seems to be more of an issue in Arts and Sciences for several reasons. While the faculty in some Health Sciences programs have very large loads of advisees, the programs they advise for tend to be more prescriptive and thus more easily understood by the faculty advisors. In Arts and Sciences, the variety of paths students might be taking, combined with the numbers of students, make the job much more complicated. As a start, the Department Chair asked that the numbers of advisees each faculty in Arts and Sciences is assigned be made even across the department. This request was met, beginning Fall Semester 2007, with mixed results. Some students who were continuing from prior semesters were not happy that they were given a different advisor, and some faculty found that they knew very few of their advisees. It may be challenging to keep numbers of advisees totally equal over time with the current process the Admissions Office has for assigning advisors. This issue will require further attention.

Another set of issues that make Arts and Sciences advising difficult includes the numerous transfer paths and articulation agreements the College has with four-year institutions (current catalog pp.87-104). While these specific options provide definite advantages for students, they also make advising complicated. Some are actual articulations, some are recommended paths, and others are true two-plus-two agreements. In preparation for the 2007-08 catalog, a concerted effort was made by the Arts and Sciences Department, the Career and Transfer Advisor, and the Registrar to remove some confusing concentration areas in the AA and AS degrees, clarify the Montana University System Core, and ensure that all information needed for transfer curricula can be easily found. This, along with new transfer planning tools should address this issue well.

In the Fall 2006, the Career Services and Transfer Advisor, in collaboration with others created a transfer planning tool and a checklist. The “Transition to a Four-Year College or University: The MSU-Great Falls College of Technology Transfer Planning Guide” and the “General Education and Transfer Advising Checklist” are very user-friendly tools that students and faculty advisors can use when students are in their last semester or two of their time at MSU-Great Falls. Training on the use of the Transfer Planning Guide and Checklist were part of the spring 2007 FOA days advising workshop and are in active use now. Both tools are available on the College's web site for easy access (Attachments 4.R-S). The Career Services web site also has current information linking to career exploration tools, state institution transfer equivalency information, and many other items pertinent to the transfer process.

Still another element of advising in the Arts and Sciences Department is that this department advises more of the students who are undecided on their career path than any other academic department on at the College. These undecided students tend to be difficult for advisors to help and are probably more likely either to be frustrated by the advising process or to simply avoid it by asking for their registration PIN and nothing else. Noel Levitz's College Student Inventory (CSI) is now being utilized more effectively to identify these students at entry and advising staff are more actively trying to help them decide what they want to do. The Retention Advisor shares lists of students whose CSI shows that they have questions about their career path with the Career Services and Transfer Advisor, who offers help in this area. The Strong Interest Inventory, for example, is one tool being used by more students in their first and second semesters than ever before, and faculty advisors are encouraged to refer students who seem to need direction to Career Services.

A path some Arts and Sciences students choose is to finish the Montana University System Core and then transfer to a four-year institution without receiving a degree from MSU-Great Falls. However, few students seem to have the Core transcripted, and thus leave the College without a documented credential from the College. The Arts and Sciences Department and Student Services view this lack of notation on students' transcripts as a possible detriment to them. As a result, a new process has been instituted by the Registrar's Office to encourage advisors and students to focus on completion of the Core before students transfer. The process should result in an increased number of students receiving the notation on their transcripts, as well as focusing students who may have been perceived by the institution as undecided on a major.

The Total Intake advising model at MSU-Great Falls includes a common folder that follows the student through their advising life at the College. The purple folder process was instituted in fall 2005, but at the time of the Commission's visit was not well understood by faculty. Purple folders are created when a student goes through the SOAR session at entry. The folders contain an Academic Planning Form, the College Student Inventory Advisor Report, the student's schedule for the first semester, and an advising record from the student's SOAR session (Attachments 4.L-M). After first semester advising, the folder is transitioned to the faculty advisor to hold continued advising records through the student's time at the College. This system was borrowed from another institution, so it needed some tailoring to fit the systems and advisors at MSU-Great Falls. The process seems to be working well when students do not change programs or stop out. The folders provide a vehicle for faculty to keep advising notes from every advising visit they have with students, and they contain tools to aid the tracking of students through the curriculum. Fine-tuning of the process is needed to better accommodate students who change programs or stop out. The New Student

Advisor acts as the central contact point for any problems that develop with the process. She provided training in the purple folder process for faculty during the fall advisor training session in 2006 and continues to be available for faculty support. Formal reassessment of the process is planned as part of Student Services' examination of all admissions, registration, and orientation processes at the end of the current academic year.

Though faculty are required to provide student advising as part of their contractual workload, there is a large variation in the approach and level of quality of that advising.

Faculty are contractually responsible for advising students in their departments. The workload of advisees is heavier in Health Sciences and Arts and Sciences than in Business and Technology programs. Further, the Arts and Sciences Department advisors have curricular challenges that Health Sciences advisors do not. This fact may impact the quality of advising done in the departments generally, but a solid understanding of whether this is true by departments or simply by individual advisors needs further examination. Complicating this issue of tracking quality of advising is the fact that, though advising is part of the evaluation protocol for faculty, the accountability measures are not strong. The promotion and tenure process includes advising as a criterion, but again, not in ways that are very objective and measurable.

Current Status of Response

Much has been done to develop and implement a systematic, effective, and equitable approach to academic student advisement at Montana State University Great Falls College of Technology. While it is not presumed that everything that can be done is now in place, many elements are in place that should show additional positive results over time.

Several new tools were developed for students and faculty to aid in the process and consistency of academic advising. The new handbooks for faculty and students illustrate and explain roles, responsibilities, and resources available to all parties. All of the new tools are available electronically on the Web for maximum accessibility. Training for each tool has been provided and will continue to be part of faculty and student orientation programming. The 2007-08 College catalog will have significant change in formatting and organization that will make transfer advising and overall understanding of all academic programs much easier. At least three professional staff are continuing their involvement in the National Academic Advising Association to ensure consistent access to the state of knowledge and best practices in the area of academic advising for the College. These three staff, along with the Assistant Dean for Student Services will continue to lead the College's efforts to strengthen advisement overall.

All of the items recommended by the NACADA consultants have been addressed with one exception: providing options for peer or paraprofessional advising and mentoring.

While this may be instituted at a later time and in some specific program areas, the practice is challenging. The staff time needed for training, in a two-year environment where student staff turnover is high, may not be justifiable. Thus far, having evaluated the resource strain against the likely benefit, the staff made the conscious decision to devote their time to other priorities that would make a bigger difference.

Student Services staff volunteered to put on the 2006 NACADA drive-in conference in Great Falls. The conference was held in October and was well attended by institutions across the state. Topics covered included: Advising for Retention of Diverse Populations, Transfer Among Montana Institutions, Creative Methods of Advising, Montana Demographics and how they Affect Advising, and Financial Aid's Impact on Advising. Attendees included staff advisors, faculty, and administrators from across Montana from public, private and tribal institutions. MSU-Great Falls Student Services staff will continue to be active in state and regional NACADA activities.

On the student side of the advisement equation, continuous assessment of student satisfaction is in place, using two instruments that are nationally recognized. The Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) is administered every other year, the current year being an SSI year. In the years the SSI is not administered, the NACADA's Academic Advising Inventory (AAI) will be. The SSI will net an overall look at student satisfaction with the College's programs and services, and the AAI will be the more in-depth look at academic advising from students' point of view. Over time these two instruments should keep the leadership of the institution and the campus community well informed as to the health of the advisement program as students sees it.

From the faculty point of view, progress has been made, but more is needed. The practice of surveying faculty regarding their in-service needs in the area of advising began this year. Continuation and enhancement of this practice will ensure faculty have an avenue to provide the input needed to make the workshops worthwhile to them, and that they have the ability to identify their own needs in this area. Still needed is an instrument that can be utilized consistently to gather information in a more standardized way about faculty engagement and satisfaction with advising and the provision of adequate support for them to do the job well. Some progress was made on making advising loads for faculty more equitable, but the sustainability of this equity is still a challenge. Another challenge is the meaningful inclusion of advisement in faculty evaluation.

Next Steps

It is the College's intention to continue to strengthen academic advisement according to the Commission's recommendation in this area. Several elements that make up a strong program of academic advising have been turned around from being deficits to strengths in the last two years. Continued monitoring and assessment should ensure that the newly gained strengths do not deteriorate over time. There are several items that the College plans to focus on next that are still weaker areas.

- Develop a systematic and sustainable way to keep advising loads equitable for faculty within departments.
- Develop a consistent way to survey faculty regarding their satisfaction with and access to resources to do their jobs as advisors well.
- Strengthen the evaluation of academic advising in faculty evaluation and/or promotion and tenure.
- Institutionalize the Academic Advising Inventory as an alternate year assessment with the Student Satisfaction Inventory.
- Analyze the Admissions, Registration, and Orientation processes and make changes that will improve student connections in their first semester with their curriculum and their advisors.

The College's own institutional assessment efforts are ongoing. The following measures that are being monitored at that level that should indicate improved advising:

- increases in the numbers of students who attain degrees or certificates at the College;
- increase in the number of students who request to have the Montana University System Core transcripted;
- decrease in the percentage of students who state that they are undecided or not seeking a degree;
- increase in student retention rates; and
- decreases in number of credits students take beyond those required for their degrees.

In addition to the above measures, student focus groups and informal assessments that include examination of the advising process should help the institution continue to improve advising. The Assistant Dean for Student Services, as the Advising Coordinator, meets regularly with the Associate Deans for Academic Affairs, the academic Department Chairs and also with the chair of the Academic Senate to provide for clear and consistent communication about issues of common concern to academic and student service constituencies.

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Summary of Progress on General Recommendation Five
Spring 2007

Introduction

In its Comprehensive Evaluation Report of Spring 2005, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) concluded that Montana State University – Great Falls College of Technology (hereinafter, “the College”) does not meet the criterion for accreditation with respect to systematic evaluation of all faculty, regardless of delivery modality. The Commission requested, in its final recommendation, that the College take appropriate action to ensure this criterion is met. The Commission further requested a written progress report on this recommendation by Spring 2007. This section constitutes that report.

Recommendation

General recommendation five of the Full-Scale Evaluation Committee Report of April 20-22, 2005 for Montana State University- Great Falls College of Technology (MSU-Great Falls COT) states:

> The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College provide regular and systematic evaluation of all full-time and adjunct faculty performance across all delivery modalities. (Standard 4.a.5)

Response

In response to general recommendation five of the Full-Scale Evaluation Committee Report, the Leadership Team (Attachment 2.A) at MSU-Great Falls COT endorsed a pilot position, Director of Instruction (Attachment 5.A), to meet the needs for supervision and evaluation of full-time, adjunct and outreach faculty across all delivery modes and to coordinate consistent adjunct faculty processes on the campus. Additionally, the requirement to provide compulsory training in instructional methodology to all two-year college faculty as mandated by Montana Board of Regents policy 730.6 #7 (Attachment 5.B) was addressed through this position.

Connecting with Adjunct Instructors

Connecting with the adjunct instructors was the first order of business for the newly appointed Director of Instruction, Dr. Heidi Pasek. Contact lists in the academic departments (Arts and Sciences, Health Sciences, and Business and Technology) and the Department of Outreach were terribly outdated. In some cases, these faculty members were not on central mailing lists and the only contact they received from the College on a regular basis was from the payroll office, the administrative assistants in the academic departments, and/or personnel from the Departments of Outreach and

Distance Education. Most of these less-than-full-time instructors received no regular supervision and few were formally evaluated or linked in any way to a lead instructor, program director, department chair, or the Directors of Outreach and/or Distance Education. A number of them did not have College identification cards so they could utilize resources from the library. Some did not even a have copy number to make copies for their classes and were paying for copies at a local copy store.

Once identified, all adjuncts were informed of new mandates for evaluation and training. The primary objectives at that point were to provide a series of adjunct orientation sessions, offer instructors a universal adjunct handbook explaining important campus policies and procedures, and introduce them to the updated evaluation protocol, a pared-down version of the full-time protocol (Attachment 5.C). Orientations were held on campus for all adjunct faculty early in Fall Semester 2005. Additionally, full-time faculty were apprised of the new strategies and processes for adjunct instructors in their department meetings. Distance instructors were oriented via telephone and email during that first semester with support provided by the Department of Distance Education.

Adjunct Evaluation Protocol Pilot

As specified above, a protocol to evaluate adjunct faculty teaching in all delivery modes was a primary charge. For consistency, the adjunct pilot protocol was closely patterned after the one used for full-time faculty; however, it was more finely tailored to fit the part-time instructors' needs (Attachment 5.C). It included an observation rubric for the on-campus and online adjunct instructor's teaching, as well as a permanent record of his or her overall performance in a permanent file. In the past, such records had been maintained only sporadically and only face-to-face courses had been evaluated.

Since distance courses had not been consistently evaluated in the past, a protocol and rubrics for their appraisal were created. These tools allowed for a more thorough investigation into how the College might demonstrate quality in distance courses and how evaluation of courses delivered online differed from that of face-to-face courses.

Once the protocol for the evaluation of teaching via all delivery modes was finalized and approved by the campus Leadership Team in early Fall 2005, it was implemented. This protocol was piloted during the academic year 2005-2006 with great success. It was modified in the spring of 2006, with input from the adjuncts, the department chairs, the Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs, and several full-time faculty members. In addition, the Director of Instruction attended the two-day intensive, *Creating a Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation Program,* at University of Arizona in Tucson in March of 2006. These events resulted in important revisions to the protocol as well as the beginnings of a formal adjunct policy (Attachment 5.D).

Quality Matters – A Focus on the Evaluation of On-line Instruction

The Distance Education Task Force, a group of experienced online faculty from all departments, was re-established by the Director of Distance Education in 2006. This group, originally formed to drive online offerings on campus, had disbanded shortly after the Director of Distance Education was hired in 2002. The new task force began to focus on the quality of the online course, as opposed to conducting an "observation" of the distance course. Most recently, this group created non-curricular guidelines (Attachment 5.E) for online courses and plans to pilot peer review of online course design for the academic year 2007-2008. This initiative seeks to ingrain the online modality assessment pieces into all faculty upon hire. The Task Force believes this can be accomplished through the faculty/quality-centered approaches that are cornerstones to MSU-Great Falls' success online—success that evolved from the original Distance Education Task Force's call to support online faculty and students and create a structure for the Department of Distance Education.

Future plans for improving and building upon the foundation created since the NWCCU Full-Scale Evaluation Committee Report of April, 2005 are as follows:

1. Build a solid base for design of online courses – hand out "guidelines" and a "design rubric" to every current instructor as well as all faculty that we hire to teach online or hybrid courses in the upcoming year.
2. Have instructors plan their goals (tenure/promotion/advancement) around these guidelines and the design rubric.
3. Assess courses based upon these rubrics – the University of Maryland *Quality Matters* model (Attachment 5.F) is being discussed as a solution and would incorporate peer review and a cycle of assessment and redesign to meet the *Quality Matters* model guidelines.
4. Provide shorter (5-8 week) workshops on methodologies and tools for faculty to focus on improving specific areas of their online instruction.
5. Provide just-in-time support from the Distance Education Office to help faculty enter into the assessment/evaluation/redesign loop for their online courses.

Through these measures, the College has made a good first step into the assessment of adjunct and full-time online instructors, but it is still a bit disjointed. We are only assessing the end result with no process tying the Department of Distance Education support and training structure back into the constant improvement process, especially be defining "quality" in online learning. We have in effect created an "ex post facto" assessment tool for faculty when we need to provide to provide it as a guide prior to online instruction and support it better during the formative and iterative process that all well-designed courses in the design/assessment/redesign mode should become. The above mentioned strategy should lead us forward as we continue to assess and improve our practice in this area.

Inclusion of Outreach Instructors

Folding outreach instructors into the adjunct faculty evaluation protocol was an important element of the year-long pilot period. During the academic year 2005-2006, the Director of Instruction and the Director of Outreach met on a regular basis to philosophize and discuss the evaluation of outreach faculty and to assess a potential protocol that would eventually be drafted and piloted in the fall of 2006. In August of

2006, the Director of Outreach accepted an interim position as Associate Dean of Programs and Curriculum. Moving the evaluation of outreach faculty forward became the responsibility of the Interim Professional and Continuing Educational Program Coordinator, whose charge it became to finalize the implementation of the Outreach faculty protocol during its first year. By Fall 2006, there were orientation sessions for that group and their evaluation ensued (Attachment 5.C). The Interim Coordinator, at the time of this writing, continues to provide on-going training in college teaching and learning, information, and connection for this group of Outreach faculty.

Training

During both the 2005 and 2006 academic years, workshops and trainings were provided specifically for adjunct instructors. Until that point, no training resources were disseminated to adjunct instructors. Most did not even know they were welcome to attend department or campus meetings and events such as commencement or Faculty Orientation and Activity (FOA) days at the beginning of each semester. There was no current adjunct faculty handbook for instructors teaching on campus or online. There was modest adjunct representation on campus committees.

Many of the adjunct instructors requested specific help in the areas of instructional methodology and technology. Sessions on “Surviving as an Adjunct Instructor” and working with Microsoft Outlook and Easy Grade Pro are just a sampling of the workshops conducted (Attached 5.G). Moreover, to connect the adjunct English faculty at the MSU-Great Falls Extension at Bozeman to their discipline area, an English faculty on the Great Falls campus provided direction and constant support to them beginning Fall 2006. Also, that semester the adjunct instructor teaching Native American Studies courses at the College represented the campus at statewide meetings in relation to Indian Education for All initiatives in Montana.

In January 2006, general orientations for adjunct instructors were held on the Bozeman campus. In addition, the Aviation program’s adjunct faculty were trained in college teaching and learning. This workshop provided a foundation based upon the works of Wilbert McKeachie and Parker Palmer. All these adjuncts, as well the Interim Assistant Dean of the College of Technology-Great Falls at Bozeman, indicated it was a beneficial endeavor, and it was repeated in Fall 2006.

Keeping Adjuncts Connected

To keep the adjunct faculty members informed, *Adjunct Updates* (Attachment 5.H), a monthly electronic newsletter, was launched. *Adjunct Updates* informed and connected all part-time instructors to campus events and activities. It also addressed changes or updates in the evaluation protocol, forms, syllabus information, changes in contact information, policy, links to the current catalog, exploration of training opportunities and a link to various resources on and off-campus. It helped the faculty members to feel more comfortable advancing issues and ideas to the Director of

Instruction and/or their Department Chairs. Finally, a seat on the newly formed Academic Senate was reserved for an adjunct faculty representative.

As is common on most college campuses, adjunct faculty at MSU-Great Falls College of Technology had limited access to any type of quality work space. There were only two areas for their primary use. One was a small office located in the Department of Business and Technology and the other half of an office in the Department of Arts and Sciences. Neither office was particularly accessible as both were often locked or occupied by others. More importantly, there was nowhere for an adjunct faculty member to meet with a student unless he or she reserved a classroom or conference room in advance. In Spring 2006, a larger, more centrally located office space was secured. This area was designated a faculty adjunct office/adjunct center for use by all part-time instructors. Four work stations with computers were established in this office, a secure area that could be accessed through a keypad code given only to the adjunct and outreach instructors. In addition to the workstations, the office provided storage space for individual instructors, a printer, a telephone, office supplies, and a selection of books and publications relevant to college teaching and, in particular, a focus on the adjunct instructor. This office continues to be a space where all part-time instructors can work and meet with students and is widely used by adjunct faculty in all three academic departments and outreach faculty.

Adjunct Hiring Practices

During the academic year 2005-2006, a more effective procedure for hiring adjunct faculty was created. Prior to the development of the new procedure, departments were hiring and maintaining individual files with the central personnel files being housed in the Office of Human Resources. Needless to say, this created a scattered process, and occasionally, qualified applicants were not advanced through the appropriate channels.

The Director of Instruction created a pool of adjuncts for Department Chairs' perusal and became responsible to notify and inform candidates of their eligibility for consideration for available positions. The applications consisted of those solicited through advertisement of various positions as well as those not solicited and/or those submitted through the campus website. In addition, a checklist summarizing the procedure for hiring and orienting new faculty members was created for use by Department Chairs and Program Directors (Attachment 5.I).

Full-time Faculty Evaluation

The Associate Dean of Academics and Student Affairs has always evaluated all the full-time faculty members. By Fall 2005, his evaluation load had become too heavy and he assigned approximately three-quarters of the faculty members on his evaluation list to the Director of Instruction. He maintained tenured faculty up for their three-year review while the Director of Instruction evaluated the remaining nineteen non-tenured faculty. This model worked well for that year. Feedback was received by faculty and Department Chairs and the model was re-evaluated at the end of the academic year.

As a result of that evaluation, it was determined that for the next academic year, the evaluation of the full-time faculty would be housed in the academic departments and a pilot program to accomplish that was developed for the Departments of Health Sciences and Business and Technology. The Department of Arts and Sciences was without a Chair during Fall 2006, so the evaluation of that faculty remained with the Interim Associate Dean of Instruction and Assessment. To date, this protocol appears to be working well; however, it will be formally assessed at the end of the academic year 2006-2007.

Formal Preparation in Instructional Methodology for All Faculty

To promote excellence in teaching and learning to full-time faculty throughout all delivery modes at both the Great Falls and Bozeman campuses, and to address the aforementioned Montana Board of Regents mandate (Montana Board of Regents Policy 730.6 # 7) that "…all teaching faculty shall have formal preparation in instructional methodology…", a seminar on college teaching and learning was created and offered through the Department of Outreach. The seminar, SEM 101-09 – Seminar of Teaching and Learning in the College Classroom (Attachment 5.J), was offered both during fall and spring semesters 2005-2006.

Participating faculty earned one undergraduate credit through the College and the seminar was funded through fee waivers facilitated enrollment. The purpose of the seminar was to identify and research the suppositions college teachers make about teaching and learning. It explored teaching philosophy, methods, and techniques. The connection between student-learning and teaching; faculty-student associations; syllabi and lesson plan design; teaching strategies to enhance student engagement and learning and development; assessment of learning and teaching was highlighted. Participants produced a project they were actually able to use. Twenty full-time MSU-Great Falls COT faculty completed the seminar during AY 2005-2006.

MSU-Great Falls COT in Bozeman faculty were unable to participate due to the financial constraints of offering the seminars over the MetNet system of delivery. As mentioned earlier, the Bozeman adjuncts were served by the Director of Instruction, the Assistant Dean in Bozeman, Bozeman Outreach personnel, the Director of Outreach, and individual faculty from the Great Falls campus physically travelling to Bozeman to deliver training and provide support. In addition to the above mentioned seminar, a graduate course for instructors teaching on-line courses continued to be offered by the Director of Distance Education through Northern Montana College.

Conclusion

Response to NWCCU Recommendation 5 resulted in a group of innovative new protocols and practices at Montana State University – Great Falls College of Technology. We reacted summarily to the concerns expressed by creating a position, the Director of Instruction, and then moved toward a more complete and mission-specific initiative to address all concerns mentioned in the Full-Scale Report. The concerns more specifically responded to are:

- The requirement in Board of Regents Policy 730.5 that “[a]ll teaching faculty shall have formal preparation in instructional methodology.”
- The increasingly compressed process for evaluation of full-time faculty, largely the result of the increase in faculty numbers and disciplines without a commensurate increase at the supervisory level.
- The recommendation of the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities that a consistent and meaningful evaluation process for faculty and adjunct faculty be developed and implemented.
- The concerns expressed by adjunct faculty to the Northwest Evaluation Team and through the Employee Morale Survey about the level/quality of their integration into College processes.
- The ongoing commitment of the College – and particularly the College’s faculty – to state-of-the-art instruction and instructional support online.

Since April 2005 the College has accomplished the following:

- Developed and implemented a model for the supervision and evaluation of adjunct faculty that provides meaningful and consistent adjunct faculty processes articulated through the employee morale survey and the recommendations of Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.
- Developed and taught coursework in instructional theory and methods required by Board of Regents Policy 730.6 (7) to all faculty.
- Developed and implemented a model tied to the coursework for the evaluation and assessment of non-tenured faculty.

Ensuring high-quality instruction – whether face-to-face or online, whether “academic” or “outreach,” whether full-time or adjunct – is the highest priority of Montana State University – Great Falls College of Technology. We are committed to continuous improvement in this area and, therefore, to continual refinement of the processes and protocols established in response to Recommendation 5 from 2005 to 2007.

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