



**Montana State University – Great Falls
College of Technology**

**Progress Report on Recommendation One of the
Focused Interim Site Visit of April, 2007**

Report Prepared and Submitted
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Introduction

Background

In April 2007, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (hereinafter “the Commission”) conducted a Focused Interim Evaluation of Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology’s (hereinafter, “the College”) progress concerning the following recommendations of the spring 2005 Full-Scale Evaluation Committee Report:

- Recommendation 2: The Evaluation Committee recommends 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)
- Recommendation 3: 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)
- Recommendation 4: 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)
- Recommendation 5: 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).

All recommendations were resolved with the exception of a portion of Recommendation 2. More specifically, the following steps of progress on that were noted by the Evaluator:

1. The College made progress in developing and implementing an institutional effectiveness plan.
2. The College revised the campus Strategic Plan to align more closely with the Montana University System planning and outcomes data and created a “Commitment to Assessment Statement”.
3. The Leadership Team revised the planning and budget process to align directly with assessment through the creation of the College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee (the CPBAC).
4. The College began the implementation of a comprehensive plan to measure institutional effectiveness at all levels.

According to the Interim Focused Report, the one step the College had not taken was moving the process through one complete cycle of assessment and resource allocation by the time of the Focused Interim Report of April 2007. That resulted in the following concern as expressed by the Evaluator:

Concern: The College has invested significant time and effort in developing and communicating its plan for assessment but not yet fully implemented the plan. The Evaluator recommends that the college complete a cycle of assessment in order to evaluate the extent to which it fulfills its mission and goals and that it use the results of assessment to improve programs, services, and resource allocation (Standard 1.B.4; Eligibility Requirement 17).

As a result, the Evaluator issued the following commendation and accompanying recommendation:

Commendation

1. The College is commended for its efforts to create and implement an annual budget process that is widely understood, actively engages all constituencies in decision-making and ties directly to institutional assessment measures and outcomes.

Recommendation

1. The Evaluator recommends that the College assess the extent to which it fulfills its mission and achieves its goals and use results of its systematic evaluation activities to influence resource allocation and to improve institutional programs, services, and activities (Standard 1.B.4., Eligibility Requirement 17).

The Commission requested the College take appropriate action to ensure Recommendation 1 would be addressed. A written progress report was requested by October 2008. The following sections constitute that report.

Summary of Progress on the Focused Interim Recommendation

We are pleased to report the completion of one full cycle of assessment. As will be established in the subsequent report, we can now clearly demonstrate how we fulfill our mission, achieve our goals, and use results to influence resource allocation and improve institutional programs, services, and activities. And, our results currently support our journey through the second cycle of assessment. We are appreciative of the input of the Commission and strongly believe it has moved us toward a model focused upon our new and ever evolving culture of evidence in which data gathering, assessment, and decision-making has become an integral part of our institutional reality.

The Complete Cycle of Assessment from the 2005 Full-Scale Evaluation to the Present

Our work over the past three years has integrated budgeting, analysis, and planning, placing it under the stewardship of a shared governance group, the College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee (the CPBAC). While our budgeting, analysis and planning processes have unique components of their own (e.g., what we measure as our core indicators of institutional effectiveness, a base-plus approach to budget-setting, and our annual goal setting and strategic planning processes) these activities are integrated to run in tandem. The harmonious nature of that integration ensures we are encouraging wide participation in a transparent budget process that utilizes our assessment of institutional effectiveness to collectively allocate resources where they are needed most for improvement or advancement.

The CPBAC took the lead in moving the campus plan through one complete cycle of assessment concluding at the close of the fiscal year. The entire cycle focused upon the extent the College fulfills its mission and achieves its goals and uses results of its systematic evaluation activities to influence resource allocation and improve institutional programs, services, and activities. The CPBAC policy defines the cyclical process and is outlined in the Attachment to this report. In general, the CPBAC was charged with providing shared governance throughout the budgeting, planning, and assessment process by:

1. Communicating the process to the campus stakeholders and constituencies;
2. Gathering and analyzing institutional data to evaluate performance and effectiveness at the institution, division, and departmental levels;
3. Leading the development and aggregation of budget projections, strategic and operational goals and objectives; and
4. Working with the college's leadership to allocate resources strategically to improve overall institutional effectiveness and achieve the goals set forth by the strategic plan.

The CPBAC established the following objectives:

1. Assess institutional effectiveness data on an annual basis and identify areas of opportunity or concern to be addressed;
2. Facilitate the development of annual budget projections;
3. Facilitate the development of annual division and department goals and objectives geared at addressing the areas of opportunity or concern;

4. In concert with the Dean's Cabinet, facilitate the strategic planning process of the College;
5. Collect, aggregate and evaluate annual budget projections and requests as well as division/departmental goals and objectives to assess the appropriateness and need of such;
6. Recommend to the Dean's Cabinet annual institutional budgets and work plans as identified in the division/department annual goals and objectives;
7. Consider requests for new allocation of fiscal, physical and human resources that do not fall within the annual budget, planning and analysis process and make recommendations to the Dean's Cabinet on the approval of such;
8. Educate the campus community on the budget and planning processes; and
9. Communicate processes and results of various CPBAC activities, meetings, and recommendations to all constituencies of the College.

The CPBAC is comprised of representatives of all curricular and co-curricular units of the College and provides comprehensive input in the areas of budget, planning, and analysis. By virtue of the positions within the College's organizational hierarchy and structure, the CPBAC's membership is permanent and includes a wide membership (Attachment). The CPBAC meetings are held quarterly. However, additional meetings can be scheduled as necessary throughout the year to focus on the budget, planning, and analysis process, entertain request for the new allocation of resources, or discuss campus-wide issues pertaining to resources and/or progress on division/departmental goals and objectives. All items brought forward to the CPBAC are considered on a consensus basis and recommendations are moved to the Dean's Cabinet for final approval.

The Cycle of Assessment Timeline

A summary of our efforts in the form of a timeline are as follows:

- April 2005 – NWCCU Recommendation to link budget setting, resource allocation, and assessment of institutional effectiveness (two recommendations combined)
- February 2006 – The College's budget committee is expanded for FY07 budget development
- October 2006 – The CPBAC is formed through the merging of the former Budget and Institutional Effectiveness Committees

- November 2006 – New institutional planning, assessment, and budget development process is implemented incorporating institutional planning and assessment into the budget process
- December 2006 – The College’s performance metrics are identified, articulated and presented to the Leadership Team
- January 2007 – Initial benchmark data is developed in reference to the College’s performance metrics
- February 2007 – Departmental budget projections and planning (goals and objectives) documents for FY08 are submitted to the CPBAC
- March 2007 – Inaugural meeting of the CPBAC
- April 2007 – FY08 Budget and AY08 divisional goals/objectives for improving effectiveness are established using the new integrated process of the CPBAC
- Fall 2007 – Refinement of institutional performance metrics and measures to clarify our measurement of institutional effectiveness
- January 2008 – Governance policy on the CPBAC approved by the campus to outline scope, role, and activities of the group
- March 2008 – FY07 Institutional performance data available and disseminated to inform assessment of the College’s effectiveness and guide the FY08 budget and planning process
- June 2008 – Divisional/department goals established. One goal per area was justified through data used to assess effectiveness. Budget restrictions did not allow for strategic funding, although some money was shifted to fund priorities (e.g. the institution’s assumption of the Learning Center to support retention)
- July 2008 – Formal completion of the first assessment and resource allocation cycle of the CPBAC as the FY09 budget and AY09 goals/objectives are approved and established
- July 2008 – The CPBAC governance policy updated to include executive (Dean/CEO) oversight and a refined budget, planning and analysis timeline
- August 2008 – End-of-year reports from divisions were submitted summarizing progress or success in meeting FY08 goals and objectives (Note: these reports will be used in next year’s process)

- August 2008 – Institutional performance metrics (Core Indicators) further refined at a Dean’s Cabinet retreat to focus data collection and assessment of institutional effectiveness
- September 2008 – Strategic planning process refined to better align with the CPBAC budget, planning, and analysis processes. Budget setting process shift to a base-plus model where actual expenditures from previous FY will be the base, and the CPBAC process will evaluate and fund priorities on the merit of how they will improve institutional effectiveness

An Overview of the Institutional Budget, Planning, and Analysis Process

This section of the report addresses the CPBAC’s budget, planning and analysis process. As established previously, our cycle involves processes integrating strategic planning activities, annual goals and objectives, and budget development/resource allocation processes to achieve the College’s mission and promote overall institutional effectiveness. The process is outlined below:

1. Strategic Plan (3 year cycle – reviewed in January)
2. Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness (Annually)
3. CPBAC Presentation and Discussion of Assessment Findings
4. Campus Input
5. Data-Informed Program/Departmental Goal Development
6. Budget Projections
7. Division Review
8. Division Modifications
9. Division Proposed Budget Submission
10. College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee Review
11. College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee Modifications
12. Budget/Goal Preparation for Cabinet Review
13. CPBAC Review and Prioritization
14. Cabinet Review and Final Modifications
15. Adoption of Budget/Goals by Cabinet
16. Budget Presentation to the Campus Community
17. Budget/Goal Tracking and Monitoring (Ongoing)

Examples

How the College has Used Data to Support Improvement

As a result of the completion of our first cycle of assessment and resource allocation, we formally and informally utilized relevant follow-on data to assess effectiveness and improve practice. Without the CPBAC charge and the broad interrelational component to our efforts, it is likely data would not have been well understood and the consequent strategies and plans never formalized. The process continues to engage us as we solidify our practices. The following section of the report will focus upon a few examples of our efforts during the first cycle.

From Performance Metrics to Core Indicators

As described in the previous section, in 2006, institutional performance metrics were drafted by the CPBAC for use in the budgeting and goal setting process. Each metric consisted of measures that provided data to illustrate our effectiveness in achieving the over-arching metric. These data were disseminated through the CPBAC for use at varying levels in the organization. As the planning year commenced and the divisions and departments prepared to report their progress for the year, it became clear the metrics were too complicated. There seemed to be two primary issues before us, each of which stemmed from the complexity of the metrics:

1. The metrics and their measures were too many, too complex, and the data were not easy to gather with certainty about its accuracy or appropriateness. In addition, asking each division to then develop their own metrics and measures further diluted the focus on our overall mission and effectiveness in meeting that mission.
2. As a campus, we were not good at developing plans (goals, objectives, and activities) derived from the data available, were clearly aligned to meeting the mission of the institution, and were easily measurable. As a result, we couldn't tell how we did and if we did accomplish anything, was it worthwhile?

It was recommended the metrics be reorganized in some way so they were more useful and the data could be more clearly linked to the assessment of institutional effectiveness. To achieve that goal, each area concentrated on drafting one specific and measureable performance goal rooted in data available and most relevant. The metrics were evaluated to see if there was a way to simplify the whole process. We adopted Alfred, Shults, and Seybert's (2007) Core Indicators of Effectiveness for Community Colleges and are currently using a modified version of their measures to gather data and assess our institutional effectiveness.

Improving Student Success in BIO 213 - Anatomy & Physiology I

It is not uncommon for students interested in health careers to struggle with Anatomy and Physiology. The College has exceptional health care programming and significant interest in the outcomes of those programs from both the student and the community perspective. Yet, nearly all programs include a requirement for the completion of Anatomy and Physiology. Through the College's assessment processes, data illustrated a need to implement strategies to support student success and increase completion rates in BIO 213-Anatomy and Physiology I. As a result, a team of faculty, administrators, and student affairs educators collaborated on a formal plan to increase persistence in that course. The plan required new resource investments as well as new instructional and student support strategies. Using the CPBAC process the College effectively allocated resources leading to the implementation of the plan in fall semester 2008.

Understanding How External Demographics Affect Marketing Strategies

Across Montana, there is a downward trend in the number of traditional aged students, and Great Falls is no different. Based on institutional effectiveness data gathered by the CPBAC, the College's marketing department found ways to invest more time and money into marketing to this target demographic. The investment resulted in a data based strategy, which brought more traditional aged students to campus. Based on this success, future marketing strategies will rely more heavily on data collected and used by CPBAC.

Evaluation of Enrollment Data in the Division of Business, Technology, and Trades

The College prides itself on addressing the needs of the community. However, based on institutional effectiveness data gathered and analyzed through the CPBAC, it was discovered the programs in the Division of Business, Technology and Trades were not performing as well as they could. Enrollment numbers appeared to be strong, but graduation rates were low. Through the CPBAC initiative, data analysis was used to establish and/or adjust programs to better target the needs of the community. The graduation results will be examined after the 2008-09 school year to see if the initiative is increasing graduation rates.

Learning Center and Tutoring Services Loss of Resources

Institutional effectiveness data gathered and analyzed through the CPBAC process revealed the College's retention rates are below national and peer averages. Based on those data, the campus identified initiatives to help focus on that need. An integral part of retention is an active learning center and tutoring services. Recently, data gathered indicated our learning center was being used by more students and success rates in the courses where tutoring was available were stable and in some cases improving steadily. Over the past year, the College lost the ability to use Perkins funds for these services.

Budgetary constraints also loomed large. Undaunted, the College decided to fold the learning center and disability services into the general operating budget. This has led to a bigger investment in tutors, which allowed services to be provided to the increased number of students. In turn, CPBAC will continue to monitor the data and the hope is to see even more of an increase in student success and retention.

Next Steps

In July, 2008, we completed a full cycle through the CPBAC process by linking our FY09 budget and AY09 goals and objectives. With that cycle fully implemented, we've moved ahead into a second cycle and will use that process to evaluate the extent to which our mission and goals have been fulfilled again. We still have to hone our indicators of success, data collection/availability, and consistently use the data to justify resource requests; however, we believe that will always be an iterative process. More specifically, this cycle involves more of a focus upon:

- Refining our indicators of success and their measures based on this past year's cycle.
- Collecting College FY08 Core Indicators of Institutional Effectiveness data.
- Assessing our performance from the FY08 data.
- Strategic Planning: developing the over-arching strategic areas of the campus.
- Starting the CPBAC cycle again using the refined indicators and base-plus budgeting model.
- Explore justification for an institutional researcher through the justification process as specified by the CPBAC.

Conclusion

Since the 2005 Full Scale Report, we have established solid processes supporting a dynamic culture of evidence and driving the College's work and resource allocation. By the end of the fiscal year 2008, we'd moved that process through one complete cycle and used follow-on data to start a second. Our processes resulted in campus-wide collaborations allowing for the utilization of systematic evaluation activities to influence resource allocation and to improve student learning and institutional programs, services, and activities. As we move into our second complete cycle of assessment, we look forward to refining our indicators of success and their measures; collecting effectiveness data from the previous cycle; using those data to assess performance, refining our campus strategic plan; and moving the cycle forward yet again.

Work Cited

Alfred, Shults, & Seybert (2007). *Core indicators of effectiveness for community colleges* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: Community College Press.