

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A Comprehensive Evaluation Report – Year Seven

The University of Montana Western
Dillon, Montana

March 26-28, 2018

A Confidential Report Prepared by the Evaluation Committee for the Northwest
Commission on Colleges and Universities – Submitted May 14, 2018
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Year Seven Evaluation visit was to evaluate University of Montana Western (UMW) with regard to all five standards for accreditation. An eight-member Evaluation Committee, assisted by Dr. Pamela Goad from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), conducted an evaluation of UMW in Dillon, Montana on behalf of the Commission. See page 4 of this report for a complete list of the Evaluation Committee membership. The committee submits this confidential report of its findings consistent with the requirements of a seven-year comprehensive review.

The Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report was submitted in a timely manner. Provost Deborah Hedeem, who oversaw the self-evaluation process, and her assistant Sue Brammer, who handled the logistics of the visit, were very responsive to the committee's logistical needs and requests for interviews, additional materials and documentation. The evidence obtained during the visit complemented the report, and the committee's findings rely on the report and visit taken together for its picture of UMW.

REPORT ON SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

UMW's Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report addresses the Eligibility Requirements and Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation. The report provides institutional context; describes the institution's changing internal environment; acknowledges the changing external environment; describes steps taken to address the previous NWCCU recommendations (the most recent relating to Recommendation 1 of the Spring 2014 Ad Hoc Evaluation regarding Standards 2.C.2; 2.C.5; 4.A.2; and 4.A.3); outlines the mission, core themes, objectives, and indicators; relates the objectives and indicators to the priorities and goals associated with the 2014-2019 Strategic Plan and its implementation through UMW's Tactical Document; and describes planning, assessment, improvement, and mission fulfillment through the complex relationships of the above.

The report is organized according to the NWCCU Standards and, generally, according to the recommended outline. Links in the report are very helpful and are connected to specific policies and documents. Responses to the standards in Standard 2 are succinct, and they generally link to adequate supporting documentation. The sections responding to Standards 3, 4, and 5 provide description and some analysis; however, it was difficult to identify specific conclusions, much less connect data and analysis to conclusions. Standard 4 is appropriately one of the longest chapters. However, UMW's complex approach to core themes, objectives, indicators, goals and priorities makes Standard 4 challenging to follow. The report notes areas of institutional strength, particularly as they relate to *Experience One* and improvements in graduation rates. The report also discusses steps the institution has taken and plans to take to address areas it believes are in need of improvement. However, plans for improvement, i.e. inputs, are often used as indicators of achievement, and, overall, the evaluators found that a robust analysis of outcomes was missing.

Numerous supporting documents were made available online, in the work room, and in interviews with key staff, faculty, and administrators. While the report provided many of the facts and descriptions of processes related to UMW's compliance with the standards, the

Evaluation Committee’s conversations with faculty, staff, students, and administrators on the UMW campus were critical to obtaining a more complete picture of UMW.

METHODS USED TO VERIFY THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

Evaluation Committee members carefully reviewed all supporting materials; examined the website; toured campus facilities; received emails from individuals; and conducted interviews with numerous administrators, faculty, staff, and students as well as with members of the Board of Regents. A list of those who were interviewed is included below.

INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS INTERVIEWED BY THE EVALUATION COMMITTEE

Albrecht	Fran	Chair, Board of Regents
Allen	Matt	Director, Admissions
Anderson	Michelle	Professor, Biology
Baver	Chad	Director, Information Technology Services
Borrowman	Shane	Assoc Professor, English
Briggs	Susan	Vice Chancellor, Administration, Finance & Student Affairs
Christian	Clayton	Commissioner, Montana University System
Chilson	Fred	Professor, Business & Technology
Chilson	Megan	Professor, Health & Human Performance
Cohen	Ilene	Director, Student Success & TRiO
Cottom	Cole	Director, Facilities Services
Daenzer	Doug	Instructor, Business & Technology
Driver	Louise	Director, Financial Aid
Else	Iola	Instructor, Equine Studies
Engellant	Roxanne	Director, Foundation & Alumni
Erickson	Charles	Assoc Professor, Business & Technology
Eudaily	Sean	Professor, HPSS
Fifield	Marni	Program Coordinator, Outreach
Forrester	Liane	Controller & Director, Business Services
Gilde	Christian	Assoc Professor, Business & Technology
Gilliard	Jen	Professor, Early Childhood Education
Graham	Vanessa	Special Events & Alumni Coordinator
Haas	Heather	Professor, HPSS
Hajduk	John	Professor, HPSS
Handlos	Janelle	Asst Professor, Health, Human Performance
Hazelbaker	Nicole	Dean of Students
Heberling	Margo	Academic Advisor
Hedeen	Deb	Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Holland	Denise	Asst Professor, Business & Technology
Howard	Vikki	Professor, Education
Kennedy	Brenden	Asst Professor, Business & Technology
Kirkley	Jack	Professor, Biology
Kish	Anne	Interim Director, Library
Lake	Patricia	Payroll-Benefits Supervisor
Levine	Rebekah	Instructor, Geology

Lowell	Hillary	Asst to the Chancellor
McCabe	Brent	Professor, Fine Arts
McCarthy	Cheri	Supervisor, Dining Services
Meier	Jeanna	TRiO, Retention Specialist
Micken	Rob	TRiO, Retention Specialist
Mock	Steve	Professor, Environmental Sciences
Morrow	Mike	Professor, Biology
Norris-Tull	Delena	Professor, Education
Nygren	Nicole	TRiO, Retention Specialist
Nystuen	Robert	Regent
Ridenour	Wendy	Asst Professor, Biology
Ripley	Anneliese	Dean of Outreach/Director of Research & Grants
Schoenemann	Spruce	Asst Professor, Environmental Sciences
Seacrest	Tyler	Assoc Professor, Mathematics
Shipman	Kathy	Instructor, Education/Coordinator Butte Offsite Program
Snider	Cole	ASUMW President
Steadman	Kurt	Assoc Professor, Business & Technology
Tews	Jes	ASUMA Vice-President
Thomas	Rob	Professor, Environmental Sciences
Ulrich	Karl	Professor, Biology
Ulrich	Judy	Professor, Fine Arts & Education
Walters	Charity	Registrar & Director of Institutional Research
Waters	Alyssa	Academic Advisor
Weatherby	Beth	Chancellor
Weinacht	Aaron	Assoc Professor, HPSS
White	Susan	Director, Career Services/Learning Center
Wilson	Bill	Director, Athletics
Wright	Eric	Professor, Mathematics
Young	Laura	Asst Professor, Health & Human Performance
Zavitz	Erin	Asst Professor, History, Philosophy & Social Sciences

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The report addresses the Eligibility Requirements appropriate to the scope of the evaluation and integrates them into sections covering Standards 1, 2, 4 and 5. Further detail is included in the review of Standards 1, 2, 4, and 5 below.

RESPONSE TO PRIOR RECOMMENDATIONS

In its July 30, 2014 letter in response to UMW's Spring 2014 Ad Hoc Report, the Commission determined that its expectations had been met relative to a set of recommendations resulting from the Spring 2010 Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation Report, Year One *Mission and Core Themes* Peer-Evaluation Report, and the Year Three *Resources and Capacity* Peer-Evaluation Report.

However, in accepting the Spring 2014 Ad Hoc Report, the Commission requested that UMW "submit an Ad Hoc Report in Fall 2015 to address Recommendation 1 of the Spring 2014 Ad

Hoc Evaluation. Recommendation 1 addresses a longstanding issue regarding outcomes assessment.”

Recommendation 1 of the 2014 Ad Hoc Evaluation: The Commission does not find evidence that the commitment to assessment has been embraced throughout the curriculum. It is therefore recommended that the institution take immediate steps to implement frequent, regular and substantive assessment of learning outcomes in all academic programs. Furthermore, it is recommended that the assessment process explicitly connect student learning outcomes to program mission, the institution’s strategic plan, the budget process and the University mission (Standards 2.C.2; 2.C.5; 4.A.2; and 4.A.3).

In its February 12, 2016 letter, the Commission accepted the Fall 2015 Ad Hoc Report and “determined that its expectations regarding Recommendation 1 of the Spring 2014 Ad Hoc Peer-Evaluation Report have been met.” The letter goes on to say, “However, the Commission urges the University to submit a strongly data focused Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report with explicit connections between data and assessment leading to continuous improvement and mission fulfillment.”

Evaluation Committee Response

The Evaluation Committee recognizes and applauds the effort UMW has made towards assessment and fulfilling earlier recommendations. The Committee also notes that additional effort is needed to identify and collect data that provide direct connection to assessment leading to continuous improvement and mission fulfillment. UMW’s Tactical Document appears to be at the heart of data for assessment leading to continuous improvement for mission fulfillment and many of the institution’s core themes. However, it was confirmed during the on-campus visit that the Tactical Document began as, and to a great extent remains, a list of inputs or projects, rather than a set of measures of outcomes. A clear set of outcomes measures would provide “explicit connections between data and assessment leading to continuous improvement and mission fulfillment.” The Evaluation Committee did not find on the institutional level “explicit connections between data and assessment leading to continuous improvement and mission fulfillment.”

RESPONSE TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

Prior to the visit, UMW provided a written response to the Student Achievement Data and the NWCCU questions related to those data. UMW also provided additional data. The Evaluation Committee explored the issues more fully during the visit. UMW successfully increased its graduation rates over this accreditation cycle and attributes this increase to the implementation of *Experience One*. Students take one course at a time for 18 days (four courses a semester) in a block schedule format. During the on-campus visit, Board of Regents members held up UMW as a model for higher education in Montana and expressed full support for the shift to *Experience One*. In order to sustain and continue to improve graduation and retention rates, the institution is undertaking several initiatives, including intrusive advising and early warning, the establishment of a Strategic Enrollment Management and Completion Committee, shifting to a different degree

audit system, implementing the Complete College America Game Changers (15 to Finish, Math Pathways, and Co-Requisite Remediation) and continuing to build its institutional research capacity to support data-informed decision making. These are just a few of the initiatives at play to address the Student Achievement Data.

STANDARD ONE -- MISSION, CORE THEMES, AND EXPECTATIONS

1.A Mission

Mission:

The University of Montana Western differentiates itself and achieves academic excellence by sustaining a culture of concentrated experiential education.

The University of Montana Western's current mission statement is published on the website, in the catalog, and in the strategic plan. It was approved by the Board of Regents in November 2014 as part of a planning process that resulted in the revised mission and the updated five-year strategic plan *Experience the Difference*. The revised mission is appropriately focused on sustaining the feature that UMW employs to distinguish itself from other comprehensive, four-year regional universities—concentrated experiential learning. Taken together the mission, Strategic Plan and its priorities and goals, core themes and their objectives and indicators, and a Tactical Document are said to provide direction for the university's efforts.

The institution has worked hard to explain how the core themes and Strategic Plan relate to the mission, and how the Tactical Document informs direction as well as demonstrates progress on the objectives, indicators, priorities, and goals of the core themes and Strategic Plan. However, the institution has not clearly articulated a definition of mission fulfillment or the means of determining an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment. [1.A.1-1.A.2]

Concern: *The report does not clearly articulate a definition for mission fulfillment that is comprehensible to the Evaluation Committee. The complex relationship between the Core Themes, the Strategic Plan and the Tactical Document makes it difficult to understand how these articulate institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment.* [1.A.2]

1.B Core Themes

Overview

As described on page 35 of the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report, with the authorization of the Board of Regents and NWCCU, the University of Montana Western has identified three core themes with two areas of emphasis embedded in each. These core themes manifest essential elements of its mission: 1) Continuously Improve Undergraduate Education and Experiential Learning. 2) Maximize Campus-wide Support for Student Success and Completion. 3) Foster Responsible Campus Efficiency and Stewardship of Resources. These core themes have been in place since 2011. [1.B.1]

The core themes are named in the 2014-2019 Strategic Plan *Experience the Difference*, and some of the core themes are mentioned in the Tactical Document, which is the University's initiative monitoring report. As found on pages 36 to 40 of the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report, each core theme has multiple objectives assigned and in turn each objective is matched to one or more indicators (1.B.2). These indicators are goals taken verbatim from the Strategic Plan, although not all goals from the Strategic Plan are represented in the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. Due to the complex terminology, it is difficult to tell what the indicators are and if they are meaningful, assessable, and verifiable measures of achievement. The core theme indicators appear to be goals rather than measures of goal achievement. In on-campus interviews, the Chancellor noted the interest in moving forward by simplifying indicators that closely align with the mission and core themes, as well as addressing the Montana University System (MUS) Performance Funding indicators. [1.B.2]

Core Theme One: Continuously Improve Undergraduate Education and Experiential Learning

Core Theme One is specifically related to essential elements of the UMW mission, which emphasizes a concentrated experiential learning education (1.B.1). The institution has three objectives for Core Theme One and these are focused on academic excellence and innovation, co-curricular programs, and recruiting and retaining high quality faculty and staff. Each objective has at least one indicator, for a total of eight indicators for the core theme. Each indicator is also a goal from the Strategic Plan. These indicators/goals focus on the following: general education curriculum, academic quality, innovation, new technologies, engagement, civic-minded leadership, and excellence. The goals reflect what the institution aims to achieve related to Core Theme One. However, information is not provided as to how the institution will measure achievement (e.g., Develop a cohesive general education program with experiential learning and achievement of student learning outcomes is listed as both an indicator and a goal). [1.B.2]

Core Theme Two: Maximize Campus-wide Support for Student Success and Completion

Core Theme Two focuses on campus-wide support for student success and completion (1.B.1). The institution has identified six distinct objectives for Core Theme Two and these are focused on co-curricular programming, enrollment management strategies, human resource strategies, facilities and infrastructure planning, resource and operations stewardship, and institutional reputation. Each of the objectives has at least one indicator for a total of twelve indicators for the core theme. Each indicator is also a goal from the Strategic Plan. They focus on the following: linking student affairs and academic support, personal health and safety programming, non-curricular events and activities, peer comparisons around student success indicators, class enrollments, recruiting best-fit students, increasing and supporting diversity, maintaining appropriate residential and co-curricular spaces, engaging alumni, enhancing the institution's profile, and implementing an integrated marketing and communication plan. However, as stated above, it is not clear how the indicators are used to measure achievement of Core Theme Two objectives. [1.B.2]

Core Theme Three: Foster Responsible Campus Efficiency and Stewardship of Resources

Core Theme Three is related to the concept of “sustaining” in the UMW mission, in that efficient use of resources will help the institution sustain its educational activities (1.B.1). The institution has identified three objectives for Core Theme Three and these are focused on human resource strategies, maintaining facilities and infrastructure, and stewardship of resources and operations. Each objective has at least one indicator, for a total of seven indicators for the core theme. Each indicator is also a goal from the Strategic Plan. These indicators/goals focus on things such as increasing awareness of UMW’s strengths for prospective employees, developing staffing and salary plans to attract and retain faculty and staff, aligning facilities, information and technology services with strategic priorities, assessing services for greater efficiency of resource use, pursuing state and federal funding, and increasing extramural funding and support. The indicators/goals are generally related to the objectives (Standard 1.B.1); however, because the indicators are synonymous with Strategic Plan goals, it is not clear how the goals serve as indicators for meeting Core Theme Three objectives. [1.B.2]

Concern: *It is not clear how the indicators are meaningful, assessable, and verifiable and form the basis for evaluating accomplishments of core theme objectives.* [1.B.2]

STANDARD TWO -- RESOURCES AND CAPACITY

2.A Governance

Overall UMW demonstrates its ability to effectively govern itself, as well as manage and operate in a manner that is consistent with its mission, purpose and characteristics.

The University of Montana Western has a governance system in which participation in decision making is distributed to consider the views of faculty, staff, and students. An elected Faculty Senate provides recommendations to the Chancellor and Provost on matters of direct concern to the faculty, including but not limited to the academic affairs of the University. The Associated Students of the University of Montana Western (ASUMW) is the elected body representing the student perspective in governance. Communication is facilitated by the range of university constituents serving on governance and other committees, as well as the participation of the Chancellor and Provost in every second Faculty Senate meeting.

UMW also has an external facing group, the University Council, which is a representative body of community members, University faculty, staff, administrators and students. As per its *Statement of Purpose*, Council members serve as ambassadors and advocates in the community and provide advice to the University in creating a supportive and enduring connection with the local community and influential individuals at the state and national level. [2.A.1]

Under the Montana State Constitution, governance and control of the Montana University System (MUS) is vested in the Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education (BOR), which possesses full authority and responsibility to supervise, coordinate, and manage public higher education in the state. The BOR appoints a Commissioner of Higher Education as the chief administrative officer of all units of the MUS. MUS is made up of the University of Montana

(UM) affiliation and the Montana State University affiliation. Montana Western is in the University of Montana affiliation. The *BOR Policy and Procedures Manual* is the public document governing the system and its institutions, and it clearly delineates the division of responsibility between the system and the institution. [2.A.2]

The Provost serves as the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO), and compliance with the Commission Standards is monitored through the institution's ongoing review and reporting processes. [2.A.3]

Compliment: *Students expressed appreciation for shared governance and for the opportunities to contribute their input to major decisions, such as the creation of the new Multicultural Center.*

Concern: *It is not clear that the system of governance is currently widely understood by all its constituencies.* [2.A.1]

Governing Board

The Montana Board of Regents consists of seven members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Montana State Senate, plus the Governor, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Commissioner of Higher Education as non-voting, *ex-officio* members. The roles and responsibilities of the Board of Regents are clearly defined and communicated. Except for the student member, BOR members are appointed to overlapping seven-year terms. Section 200 of the *BOR Policy & Procedures Manual* outlines the composition and responsibilities of the board, and the *Code of Expectations* does not allow contractual, employment, or financial interest in the MUS or its institutions. If a conflict issue is disclosed, the member may not vote on or promote the discussion of that issue. The BOR operates as a committee of the whole. Subcommittees are responsible to, and report to, the BOR, which has final decision-making and approval authority. The board has four standing committees: Academic, Research and Student Affairs; Budget, Administration & Finance; Two-Year and Community College; and Achieve Montana Oversight. The *Policy & Procedures Manual* includes Policy 103- Procedures for Maintenance of Policies, revised in May 2009. The UMW Chancellor and CEO is appointed by the BOR upon the recommendation of the President of the University of Montana. Policy 205.2.1 outlines the duties and responsibilities of the chancellor, including leadership and coordination for all campus activities, including academic, fiscal, and student affairs. Typically, the Chancellor reports to the University of Montana President. However, the University of Montana is in transition, and all CEOs of the University of Montana affiliation currently report to the Commissioner of Higher Education. The board regularly reviews its own organization, operation, and performance, as per Policy 705.1 [2.A.4-8]

Compliment: *BOR members spoke passionately about UMW's distinctiveness, the design of Experience One, progress on key performance indicators, and UMW's role within Montana higher education. They articulated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities as they relate to UMW as a separately accredited institution and expressed their confidence in the leadership of the institution.*

Leadership and Management

The University is administered by a chancellor; provost/vice chancellor for Academic Affairs; and vice chancellor for Administration, Finance and Student Affairs. Vitae of the chancellor and vice chancellors provide evidence of their qualifications to lead and manage their units. The Chancellor's Cabinet includes the vice chancellors; the directors of University Communications, Institutional Technology, Development & Alumni Relations, and Athletics; and the dean of students. As per BOR policy 205.2.1 the chancellor is the chief executive officer responsible for the management of UMW. She provides leadership and coordination for all campus activities including academic, fiscal, and student affairs. Typically, the chancellor reports to the president of the University of Montana, but the chancellor currently reports directly to the Commissioner of Higher Education. The chancellor previously served as the provost/vice president for academic and student affairs at Southwest Minnesota State University. [2.A.9-11]

Policies and Procedures

Academics

Academic policies relating to faculty rights and responsibilities are located in the *BOR Policy & Procedures Manual* (BOR 302) and in the UMW Faculty Association Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). In addition, the CBA outlines that academic units have adopted Unit Standards that detail specific department-level requirements for the ways in which teaching, research, and service are reported and evaluated (section 9.000). All these documents are available online. Student academic freedom rights and responsibilities are also outlined in UMW Campus Policies in Policy 200.4 Student Academic Freedom on the UMW Campus Policies website. [2.A.12]

All library and related policies are available on the UMW Library website, the MUS statewide website, or on the main UM library website. Policies on the UMW website include off and on campus library access, borrowing policies, and information about library services and resources. Policies on copyright are located on the UM library website. The UMW library also has a presence in each Moodle course where the library policy and information can also be accessed by enrolled students. However, the policies and procedures found on the main MUS and UM library website are not easily discoverable from the UMW library website. In addition, there are no links to UMW specific policies posted for library safety and security, and no link to all of the library and information acceptable use for computer technology or copyright policy found in other locations. Online learning policies for the MUS system are posted on the BOR website. Policy 303.7 outlines procedures and policies for eLearning standards and data collection. Policy 940.20 from the BOR Financial Affairs section of the Policy Manual articulates fees for eLearning. The MUS Online Website provides information on all MUS campus online programs and online learning administrative information. These policies are in alignment with the NWCCU policy on distance learning. The majority of UMW online programs are located in the Education department. These programs and courses, overseen by Education faculty, are consistent with the experiential mission of the institution and these programs are evaluated and accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). [2.A.13]

Suggestion: *Moving forward the institution might consider a consolidated UMW library policy and procedures website or library guide that links to all UMW, MUS, or main UM library policies and procedures. Current policies are scant in nature and distributed across different website pages.*

Evidence provided by faculty and students indicates that the institution adheres to the transfer credit policy as stated in the catalog. Students expressed their appreciation at the efficiency of the transfer process and the care of the staff involved. Staff went above and beyond to ensure that students received the guidance and help needed. Faculty confirmed that they have adequate participation within the transfer evaluation process. [2.A.14]

Students

The university catalog clearly states the students' rights and responsibilities. The documentation provided in the catalog is very thorough and gives good guidance for students to ensure compliance. New students are first informed of policies at the summer Dawg Days events. Evidence supports that students are given adequate information regarding the process for filing a complaint and the procedures that will be followed. While not uncovering any institutional oversights in the complaint process for students, the Evaluation Committee encourages the institution to continue to build upon its processes and to maintain documentation of its records of student complaints for its use in continuous improvement. [2.A.15]

Admissions policies are clearly written and consistent on all forms of evidence presented. Students who do not meet admission requirements for a four-year degree program are given alternate degree pathways and provided additional support until they are able to transition to a four-year program. Transfer students receive an excellent response time as transfer students are given an admissions decision, transfer credit evaluation and degree audit within ten days of a complete admissions file. Interviews confirmed that this is a collaborative process with Admissions, Registrar's Office, Advising, and Faculty. Academic suspension policies are clearly defined in the university catalog. Only the horsemanship and education programs have selective admissions, and the information shared indicates compliance. Course placement and prerequisites are clearly stated in the catalog. The block schedule creates some unique challenges to enforcing prerequisites, but all individuals confirmed that they were satisfied with the enforcement of the prerequisites to ensure that students had adequate knowledge for placement. [2.A.16]

Co-curricular policies and responsibilities are stated within the ASUMW website. ASUMW highly encourages student participation within student clubs and there is an extensive number of student clubs for an institution of this size. Students and staff confirmed that the Dean of Students helps to guide these activities and ensure that they are within University policies. [2.A.17]

Compliment: *Students expressed a sincere appreciation of the assistance that they receive from faculty and staff at Western. The students felt that they are adequately supported and that people on campus genuinely care about their success.*

Human Resources

Human resource policies are shared among the Montana University System, the University of Montana and UMW. Care should be taken to ensure that policies are not in conflict and direct references are up to date. The collective bargaining agreement for faculty requires that faculty are apprised of all conditions stated in 2.A.19. However, faculty and human resources staff felt that they could improve upon the onboarding process. Faculty specifically expressed the need for training for new faculty in the advising area and would like to engage with their students earlier. Staff are given adequate position information and expectation within their position descriptions, but a policy for regular evaluations could not be found. However, evidence provided by human resources and feedback from faculty and staff indicates that they are evaluated somewhat regularly. These evaluations and human resource records are stored adequately and meet confidentiality requirements. [2.A.18-20]

Institutional Integrity

The University of Montana Western publications and online information consistently and clearly depict the institution's programs and services. The UMW annual catalog carefully articulates its academic intentions, and includes clearly stated academic completion times for undergraduate and associates programs. UMW provides evidence that its publications are regularly reviewed for the accuracy of its representations regarding mission, programs and services. UMW reports that its consumer disclosures are in compliance with the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. [2.A.21]

The University of Montana Western consistently demonstrates high ethical standards when dealing with its constituencies, the public, external organizations and the Commission. The University adheres to a commitment to the fair and equitable treatment of its students, faculty, staff and others. Articles contained within the University's Collective Bargaining Agreements outline informal and formal grievance procedures to ensure timely resolution at each step in the process. [2.A.22]

The University's ethical standards to include its dealings with multiple constituencies and the Commission are governed by various internal and State policies that prescribe codes of ethics and prohibitions of conflicts of interest. The *Employee's Guide to Standards of Conduct*, published by the Montana State Human Resources Division of the Department of Administration, and the Campus policy on Conflict of Interest and Financial Disclosure, each prescribe an expectation for exercising high ethical behavior by all UMW personnel and its affiliates. According to the *Employee's Guide*, employees must sign a statement that acknowledges that they have read the document and will abide by its standards. The guide clearly includes descriptions of prohibited conflicts of interest, self-dealing, unwarranted privilege, and gift acceptance. The guide prescribes responsibility to each state institution to enforce the standards. The guide describes how violations may be reported along with possible penalties and other sanctions when violations are deemed to have occurred. [2.A.23]

The University is subject to various Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education policies that collectively define all aspects of the ownership of patents, intellectual properties and electronic

course materials, and which also establish copyright control and governance of compensation received from creation and production of these properties. [2.A.24]

The University accurately describes its NWCCU accreditation status in its annual catalog along with specialized accreditations that are specific to certain academic programs. [2.A.25]

University policies require that the purchasing authority delegated to departments for goods or contracted services be executed without favoritism or conflict of interest, and that their procurement activities be above reproach or appearance of impropriety. The University maintains a system of delegated purchasing authority that includes guidelines and definitions of contract types for services that are either under or over \$5,000, and for guest speakers under \$2,000. Procurement procedures include a contractor's pre-qualification checklist that establishes requirements and prohibitions on being classified as an independent contractor. Comprehensively, university policies are designed to ensure that procurement of contracted services are accomplished in a manner that maintains the integrity of the institution by adhering to state and institutional-specific policies, procedures, and guidelines and that a system of oversight exists to ensure that procurement of goods and services by institutional representatives are done so in the execution of legitimate business activities of the university. [2.A.26]

Academic Freedom

The commitments and traditions of UMW Academic Freedom policy and faculty responsibility are present in the *BOR Policy and Procedures Manual* on the MUS website that includes an update of BOR Policy 302 – Academic Freedom of the Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education. The BOR 302 policy was updated to incorporate academic freedom principles in the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges documents. [2.A.27]

Additional faculty and staff rights and responsibilities are documented on the main University of Montana website in Policy 370 Rights and Responsibilities of Academic Personnel. Academic freedom is also assured in the Collective Bargaining Agreement Between University of Montana University Faculty Association and the Montana University System (UFACBA2013-2017), section 6.100. The academic personnel policy 370 also affirms independent thought and the sharing of intellectually free scholarship and ideas. Student academic responsibilities related to plagiarism, and academic dishonesty are available to students and faculty through the Campus Life 4 - Rules and Regulations (a. Academic Conduct). [2.A.28-29]

Finance

The University of Montana Western adheres to concise internal financial policies as well as those mandated by the State of Montana and the State Board of Regents. With oversight of State auditors, institutional financial activities are governed and/or monitored with regard to operating and capital budgets, retention of reserves, fundraising assets, cash and debt management, and inter-dispersal of funds between accounts. [2.A.30]

2.B Human Resources

As a small institution, providing adequate staffing can be a challenge. This was expressed by faculty, staff and administration. Staff members would like to see additional support for the campus staffing provided. As an example, there is one groundskeeper for a campus of 30 acres. It appears that staffing levels in custodial and grounds are below best practices for staffing levels. On the faculty side, evidence supports that many faculty consistently teach overload contracts to meet student demands. Faculty expressed concern that the academic integrity of the institution might be in jeopardy due to staffing levels. This indicates that additional faculty might be needed, but concern also was raised regarding how cost effective this would be. In addition, faculty and staff expressed concern regarding the ability to find qualified personnel due to insufficient job applicant pools in the Dillon, Montana region and to salary levels. In some cases, positions have been open for up to three years. For the benefit of the students, many on campus have performed additional duties, resulting in multiple personnel having several job functions, either in extended interim appointments or quasi-permanent appointments. Staff felt that this can be confusing for performance evaluations as the additional duties can make their current responsibilities suffer. Although the evaluation of the chancellor is governed by Montana University System policy, no policy was found regarding the regular and systematic review of staff performance. However, evidence provided indicated that staff are evaluated somewhat regularly. [2.B.1; 2.B.2; 2.B.5]

Professional development funds for faculty are small, but are provided. Staff conveyed their frustration about the lack of professional development and career progression opportunities. Some staff felt that opportunities could be sought out, but they were not readily available. [2.B.3]

Faculty and administration confirmed that many faculty agree to overload contracts. The faculty understand that they continue to be responsible for their duties of service and professional development beyond the overload contracts. Due to concerns for student success, they are willing to take on the instructional overloads, but worry that it is now affecting the academic integrity of their programs. [2.B.4]

Faculty evaluation is described within the faculty collective bargaining agreement. Faculty have indicated that the evaluation process is being followed. [2.B.6]

Concern: *Staffing levels for both faculty and staff might put the institution at risk of not employing a sufficient number of qualified personnel to maintain its support and operations functions, or an appropriate number of qualified faculty to achieve educational objectives and to support student learning needs.* [2.B.1; 2.B.4]

2.C Education Resources

UMW offers certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor degrees and the course requirements, course descriptions, as well as program and degree learning outcomes are provided to students and published annually in the catalog. The programs align to the UMW *Experience One* mission and vision, uniquely designed to enhance student success through support of an experiential

learning model. This model provides longer class periods and concentrated course scheduling to encourage project-based student learning, and allow for extended authentic field experiences appropriate to each discipline. Additional department, program and course information is available for review on the Academics section of the UMW website. [2.C.1-2].

Credit and degrees are awarded in a manner consistent with institutional policies and course syllabi contain the learning outcomes and assessment criteria on which students will be evaluated. Admission and graduation requirements are clearly defined and published in the catalog and website for student review. In addition, programs in the Education department meet Montana Office of Public Instruction and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) Standards, and have been approved for continuing accreditation, by the Montana Board of Education, and by CAEP. Department of Business and Technology programs meet the requirements of the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE) external business accreditor. Program designs appear to provide appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, and synthesis of learning. Students progress through 100 to 400 level courses and include internships, senior research or thesis, or capstone classes. Department assessment plans monitor student success and achievement. [2.C.3-4]

The process for curriculum design, approval, implementation, and revision is described in the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report and documented in the *Articles of the Faculty Senate*. However, stakeholders on campus have differing understandings of the process. The report indicates that proposals start with the faculty member who obtains department level approval, and then go to the Provost, who determines resource implications. The proposal then moves to the Faculty Senate and the General Education Committee. Others on campus indicated that proposals go from the department to the Registrar, who manages the process. Some felt it was appropriate to approach the Provost initially to see if the proposal was feasible prior to doing the work involved in the submission, but that this was informal and that proposals go from the department to other departments for commentary initially, and then to the Faculty Senate and GE Committee. Although curricular changes are listed as matters to be reviewed and recommended by the Faculty Senate on the website for that body, the process does not seem to be clear to all constituents. The faculty do exercise a major role in curricular decisions and structures and processes for the design, approval, implementation, and revision of the curriculum are in place. [2.C.5]

Program learning outcomes are documented in the catalog. Departments submit annual assessment reports which are reviewed by the Academic Assessment Committee. For General Education (GE) courses, these reports are reviewed by the GE Committee. The most recent Academic Assessment Committee report includes areas of focus, committee activities, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data, and specifically how this data was shared. The GE Committee report documents the collection of assessment reports for the various GE categories, the outcomes assessed, means of assessment, strengths and weaknesses of GE course assessment, and areas for improvement. These reports document that faculty with teaching responsibilities are taking responsibility for fostering and assessing student learning. [2.C.5]

The challenging *Experience One* course structure has necessitated strong faculty and library partnerships. UMW Lucy Carson Library considers faculty collaboration to be an essential

library service with a goal to integrate library materials into courses. Faculty can request library research assistance in their courses by connecting to the librarian at the Request Research Help section of the library website. The library staff provide online disciplinary research guides, citation help, course reserves, and database searching support and instruction. Since 2016, through a resource sharing initiative, UMW has been a member of the TRAILS organization (Treasure State Academic Information and Library Services) which has expanded access to library holdings across the Montana University System. This collaborative effort more than doubles the number of materials that the Lucy Carson Library can quickly and easily access for its patrons and improves access for faculty and courses. [2.C.6]

Compliment: *Efforts of the library to reach beyond the campus, build relationships and develop partnerships to steward shared resources are commendable.*

Procedures for prior learning credit are governed by Board of Regents' Policy BOT 301.19. The policy meets most of the specifics related to Standard 2.C.7. However, the policy does not state that credit awarded for prior learning may not duplicate other credit awarded to the student in fulfillment of degree requirements. The policy is referenced in the university catalog.

Concern: *BOT 301.19 or the catalog needs to clearly state that credit awarded for prior learning may not duplicate other credit awarded to the student in fulfillment of degree requirements.* [2.C.7]

Transfer credit acceptance for institutions within Montana is governed by Montana University System common course numbering agreements. As the majority of UMW students come from Montana, this facilitates the efficient transfer of most students. Faculty have representation within the statewide transferability councils and voiced no concerns regarding the acceptability of this process or transfer credits. Faculty expressed that they were highly involved within the transfer evaluation process and felt confident that the academic integrity of transfer credits was being enforced. [2.C.8]

Undergraduate Programs

The General Education component of undergraduate certificate and degree programs at UMW reflects an integrated course of study that helps students develop the depth and breadth needed to become effective learners and citizens. All undergraduate degree and certificate programs have a clearly stated and recognizable GE core consisting of basic knowledge and methodology of the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences, and social science. Specific requirements are outlined in the university's catalog and on degree planning worksheets. Procedures for meeting GE core requirements for students transferring to UMW are also outlined in the catalog. The catalog states that the GE program is based on the Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) developed by LEAP/AAC&U. These outcomes are specifically identified in the philosophy statement for GE and posted in the catalog. However, they are not identified in degree planning worksheets as is stated in the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. [2.C.9-11]

General Education outcomes are identifiable and assessable and are connected to the institution's mission in a general way. The GE component is intended to create a coherent academic

experience. The connection to learning outcomes for academic programs appears to be assumed in the sense that GE provides foundational skills and knowledge for these programs. [2.C.10]

Additionally, although the GE Committee has provided assessment reports for the past three years, these reports focus primarily on the activities of the committee and identify issues needing to be addressed rather than reporting on how assessment data have been used to improve student learning. The most recent report notes a number of weaknesses such as faculty being unfamiliar with the LEAP outcomes, challenges with course by course assessment, and lack of actionable data. One positive outcome of General Education assessment has been that faculty meet together to discuss their findings, which did not occur in the past. However, currently, consistency in the outcomes being measured across sections is lacking in some cases and measures differ, making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the data collected.

The GE Committee has plans to examine and assess samples of student work with a common scale in order to draw conclusions about achievement of the LEAP outcomes. However, the committee acknowledged the difficulty inherent in assessing General Education as a program or determining that the achievement of LEAP outcomes occurred on the basis of assessing students' work from single courses or even a collection of courses. Another complication is that some syllabi have three sets of learning outcomes--state level outcomes for commonly numbered courses, program level outcomes for courses that count for General Education but are also required in particular majors, and General Education outcomes. Furthermore, the GE Committee noted that it has no authority or ability to ensure compliance with assessment requirements for faculty who are not participating. [2.C.10-11]

The institutional goal that all GE courses have an experiential component or high impact practice was familiar to the GE Committee but they did not have input into the measures identified in the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report related to this goal. While they felt that this goal had been achieved, and stated a number of examples, the evidence was anecdotal rather than being based on data collected by the GE Committee or the university.

Compliment: *The GE Committee has made enormous strides forward in identifying a set of outcomes for General Education and getting faculty to identify and assess relevant outcomes for the courses they teach, and indicating these in syllabi and in the catalog. The faculty clearly sees value in discussing their assessment results and curricular and pedagogical implications.*

Suggestions: *The Evaluation Committee suggests that the institution and its faculty make more explicit connections across mission, GE outcomes, and program learning outcomes; that Faculty work toward consistency in assessment practices across course sections, and also examine ways to integrate the assessment of state, program, and General Education outcomes to streamline assessment practices for faculty and students. The Evaluation Committee also suggests that the institution involve the GE Committee in determining measures for assessing institutional goals that are under their purview.*

Continuing Education and Non-Credit Programs

UMW's School of Outreach oversees and facilitates all off-campus, continuing education and special learning programs. The School of Outreach's mission is "to provide high quality learning opportunities to citizens of all ages, support the University of Montana Western's unique experiential mission, and implement the Montana University System's Comprehensive Community College mission/vision." It offers 1) state-funded, credit-bearing 2) self-supporting credit-bearing and 3) self-supporting, non-credit bearing programs. All of these support UMW's mission, "The University of Montana Western differentiates itself and achieves academic excellence by sustaining a culture of concentrated experiential education." The majority of the credit-bearing offerings by the School of Outreach fall into Elementary Education programs, all of which include experiential education, even though the course offerings may be offered online. These academic offerings are developed by UMW faculty and follow standard academic policies and procedures.

The School of Outreach oversees all continuing education and special learning activities. Under the direction of the Provost, the School of Outreach lies under Academic Affairs. The policies and procedures for offering credit and non-credit courses through the School of Outreach follow Board of Regents policies and institutional guidelines including extensive data collection processes to assess the various programs.

School of Outreach targets continuing education and special programs which are developed in-house based on the results of community needs, are offered with consistent policies and procedures, and include student learning outcomes. The Registrar's office monitors enrollment and ensures that established procedures are followed. [2.C.16-19]

2.D Student Support Resources

UMW provides student services that are commensurate with the size and mission of the institution. To better serve the unique student population, students are encouraged to participate in co-curricular opportunities to support the academic mission and facilitate student learning. These activities are tracked through the Paw Prints program for later assessment. This can include student clubs, educational workshops, tutoring services, educational internships, or collaboration with local school districts. This is in line with the institution's curriculum and supports the academic mission. Students expressed that they felt very supported by the institution and the Paw Prints program resulted in additional participation. They were appreciative of the services and facilities provided. Many student study spaces have been created across campus. The students described many of their favorite study nooks or alcoves on campus. These were quiet places that provided a comfortable learning environment. [2.D.1]

As a small institution, UMW does not employ their own police force, but has agreements with the local police force in case assistance is needed. In addition, the University employs a night watch, Securitas, to provide additional security to the campus. Students expressed that they felt that security on campus was adequate and that they felt safe on campus. The Committee finds that there should be clarification in the catalog to differentiate between facility and life/safety emergencies and whom to contact in that event. Evidence provided in the Annual Security and

Fire Safety Report and Title IX were good examples of crime statistics and required federal disclosures. The Annual Security and Fire Safety Report was extensive and shows the institution's commitment to the safety of the campus community.

Concern: *There should be clarification in the appropriate publication(s) to differentiate between facility and life/safety emergencies and whom to contact in that event so as to provide adequate provision for the safety and security of students.* [2.D.2]

UMW provides an open enrollment option for students into two-year programs who do not qualify for full admission to four-year programs. Students in need of developmental assistance must complete any developmental course needs within three semesters of enrollment. Students may not change to a four-year academic program until all admission requirements have been met. Students are oriented to the campus through the Bulldog Bound summer program and the Dawg Days orientation that occurs just prior to fall semester. Bulldog Bound provides students with policies, procedures, and information for students to be successful at Western. Students are provided individual advising appointments via phone during the summer. Orientation focuses on getting new students integrated into the UMW community. [2.D.3]

In the event of program elimination, the institution is required to complete a Program Termination plan as required by the Montana University System. Faculty confirmed that students were able to complete any programs that had been terminated. This was accomplished through individual study courses or substitutions as the faculty deemed appropriate. [2.D.4]

UMW is currently in the process of implementing the Acalog catalog software system. Staff felt hopeful that this will be a convenience for students, faculty, and staff. All items required in 2.D.5 and 2.D.6 were found in the catalog. In addition, the institution includes the credit hour policy in the catalog. However, the actual contact time scheduled for classes seems to require less time than the defined credit hour, and it was not clear to the Evaluation Committee that the actual contact time meets the institution's definition of credit hour. Students and staff expressed that publications accurately portrayed the institution. Although students rely heavily upon faculty for employment information, Career Services also supports this need. Students were not fully aware of the services provided by Career Services, but felt that their needs were fulfilled. [2.D.5-6]

Concern: *It is not clear if the meeting times included in the academic schedule meet the credit hour contact time requirement as stated in the institution's catalog.* [NWCCU Policy on Credit Hour]

The institution adheres to state record retention policies and securely stores records as required. In addition, FERPA training is performed at the annual opening meetings and various groups are notified via annual email notifications. [2.D.7]

The *Experience One* program offers unique challenges to registration and financial aid programs. Both areas have worked through these difficulties, but the process is very labor intensive and may require additional staffing as the institution grows. Information about financial aid is

available in the catalog and online. Evidence supports that students are given sufficient information regarding financial aid awards and the different types of aid available. [2.D.8]

The Financial Aid Office is aware of their default rates and works to reduce their default rate. As responsibility has shifted from federal repayment programs to institutional responsibility, the Financial Aid Office is looking to outsource the default services. Staff feel this is a necessary step for an institution of this size without additional resources. The Financial Aid Office will be implementing this new product in the next year. [2.D.9]

Student advisement is shared between faculty and professional advisors. Students are provided with an advising manual that nicely lays out student and advisor responsibilities. Students expressed that they were able to find an advisor when needed. The faculty expressed that advising loads can vary with some faculty having up to 100 advisees. This can make it difficult to balance, especially for faculty during the schedule block set aside for their professional development. Although the professional advisors maintain advising handbooks and workshops, the faculty advisors expressed concern regarding training for new faculty. They felt this could be an area to expand upon. [2.D.10]

There is an extensive number of student clubs on campus. Many of the student clubs are linked to academic programs. The ASUMW is actively involved in student co-curricular programs and supports the core themes of student success and experiential learning. ASUMW reports to the Dean of Students and felt that they had an adequate voice on campus. [2.D.11]

The auxiliary services provided by UMW are commensurate with the size and mission of the institution. Students spoke highly of the opportunities for input and the services provided. Auxiliaries have been creative to ensure fiscal support is adequate. An example of this is contracting with the Montana Youth Challenge to utilize the residence halls during times when there is available capacity. [2.D.12]

Students participating in co-curricular and athletic programs are treated similarly to regular students. Interviews conducted confirmed that all students must meet the same admission and graduation requirements. Many of the co-curricular clubs support the academic mission of the institution. An example of this are the rodeo, horsemanship, young farmers and ranchers, equestrian, and draft horse driving clubs that are tied to the equine studies program. [2.D.13]

Electronically, distance education students are treated similarly to on campus students with unique username and password access to student information and learning management systems. Additional identity verification is utilized as many distance programs require some face-to-face components. This allows the faculty to become familiar with their students and build a sense of community. Many of the distance courses also require experiences within the K-12 schools and therefore background checks. Interviews conducted with staff indicated that they make an effort to ensure that distance students are also provided with additional student support and receive many services similar to on campus students. [2.D.14]

2.E Library and Information Resources

The UMW Lucy Carson Library provides access to library and information resources with an appropriate level of depth, and breadth for a library of this size to support the institution's mission, core themes, and programs. Since 2016, the Treasure State Academic Information and Library Services Consortium (TRAILS) collaboration has increased the access to library holdings across the Montana University System and expanded the availability of resources. The block scheduling system and focus on experiential learning create a unique situation for collections development, and although challenging, the library appears to have a plan for engaging course faculty in the collection development process and a flexible workflow process. During the onsite visit, faculty and students commented very positively on the contribution that the library makes on campus and to the university mission. [2.E.1]

Compliment: *The library has a strategic framework that guides library decision-making, resource development and services: 1) A Shared Collection Development Model; 2) The Lucy Carson Library Committee; 3) Library Support for Formal Reviews; and 4) Resource Sharing. This is an effective strategy that is contributing to defining how the UMW library impacts campus teaching and learning efforts.*

Although the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report discusses strategies for assessing library collections and services, and using evidence and feedback for collection and service development, details of this were not readily available in the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report or on the library or assessment website. However, statistics, data, and discussion with the library staff, the library committee and faculty, provided at the onsite visit, do demonstrate processes used by the library. Regular communication with faculty through committee work, especially the Library Committee, provides channels for collecting feedback from library patrons. In addition, study and survey data are collected through the TRAILS partnership campuses to provide evidence for planning and decision-making about patron needs and logistics for resource sharing. [2.E.2]

The Library Director of the UMW library does provide library instruction sessions at the request of faculty teaching courses to introduce students to the library resources and services. Students taking distance courses can access library resources online and off campus by searching the catalog for online resources. Students can reach out for library research support in person or online through email and an Ask-A-Librarian chat feature. In addition to teaching information literacy sessions for students enrolled in all disciplinary courses, UMW in collaboration with UM Missoula's College of Education & Human Sciences offers three K-12 library media programs to prepare teachers to fill roles in the K-12 libraries. The Library Director is an instructor in these programs. The tracks are: K-12 library media endorsement, non-teaching library minor, and a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Library Media Services. Many of the Education department courses are distance courses and the UMW library provides links to library resources and services from within the Moodle online courses. [2.E.3]

Although the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report discusses how the UMW library uses a variety of mechanisms for evaluating library teaching, services and resources, such as surveys, usage statistics, and listening sessions, there is little assessment evidence available on the library

website. Since the librarian partners with faculty to integrate information literacy into courses, there are not specific library learning outcomes that are assessed. However, documents and data provided at the site visit do demonstrate that the library regularly evaluates library collections, services and support for campus library patrons. Through participation in the TRAILS consortium there is also evidence of assessment of shared resources that includes a feasibility study and surveys. Assessment and evaluation of the library media online courses is conducted through the Education department program. [2.E.4]

Suggestion: *Since UMW uses the AAC&U LEAP outcomes to assess general education, the library might consider adopting the LEAP information literacy outcomes and design an assessment plan for library-related teaching and student learning outcomes. Upon review of some individual course syllabi, courses do assess library research and information literacy through the disciplinary assessment plans. Due to the strong faculty/librarian partnerships, faculty-librarian partnerships might be a way to assess the impact of library instruction on student learning.*

2.F Financial Resources

The institution demonstrates sufficient cash flows and reserves to support its programs and services. Institutional financial planning reflects realistic projections and allocations of financial resources as well as prudent risk management to meet its short-term and long-term financial obligations. As Montana Western is a member of the Montana University System, resource pooling among three other system entities, to include a state flagship institution, provides increased fiduciary oversight and enhanced financial risk management. Independent bonding audit reports for the Montana University System demonstrate that both the system and Montana Western provide conservatively adequate debt coverage as required by debt coverage ratios in their bond covenants. [2.F.1]

Montana Western employs two concurrent processes to ensure realistic budget creation and management. Final university operating budgets are projected on a four-year basis utilizing a centralized process that involves key university administrators, the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor for Finance and Student Affairs (VCF&SA) and the Provost. These administrative officials receive budget input from the university Budget Committee and Academic and Administrative Council. Final budget development by key institutional administrators ensures alignment of limited resources with the institution's strategic and master plans. As the Montana University System receives its operating budget from the State in a lump sum, the VCF&SA for Montana Western meets with its system peers to determine how the lump appropriation will be distributed among its four institutional entities. The proposed distribution is approved by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) and the State Board of Regents (BOR) for inclusion in the Governor's budget request to the Legislature.

The university uses well-defined monitoring procedures for disbursement and distribution of its approved budgeted funding and demonstrates that it utilizes appropriate budgeting procedures that are practicable in relation to its available resources and abilities to project future funding inflows.

While the Montana University System enrollments have experienced a decline in recent years, Montana Western is attributing their enrollment increases to its unique *Experience One* and block scheduling program. The university appears to be implementing responsible projections of future enrollment growth in its budgeting processes. [2.F.2]

The university provides for inclusive internal budgeting processes that allow its constituents to be represented by the Budget Committee. The committee includes department heads and three student representatives. Auxiliaries and other budgets for non-state appropriations are developed between the respective budget managers and the VCF&SA. The university demonstrates that it follows a well-documented budgeting process that is internal to the institution as well as the policies and procedures of University of Montana and the state of Montana. [2.F.3]

The university ensures timely and accurate flow of financial information through the use of the Banner enterprise resource planning system. Banner is an industry recognized purpose-built financial and human resource management support system that has proved very well adapted to university uses. The Banner system is designed to present financial information using generally accepted accounting principles. Montana Western follows accounting and reporting standards prescribed by GASB (Government Accounting Standards Board) and evaluates technical advice provided through NACUBO (the National Association of College and University Business Officers).

As the Banner database and its program management is centralized to the University of Montana, accounting methodology is standardized, which facilitates consolidated System accounting reports to the State. Centralization also provides for more efficient system management and some degree of risk mitigation for the universities. Montana Western accounting information is independently coded in the Banner system to allow for specific institutional accounting records.

Montana Western employs a very detailed documented matrix of comprehensive internal accounting controls across multiple university transaction types. While State audits do not formally address functionality of the comprehensive accounting control system for the university, auditors do review accounting controls as they relate to their overall audit objectives. From the latest 2015 financial audit, auditors found no material deficiencies in internal controls with respect to their state audit objectives. [2.F.4]

The institution's capital budgets and long-range capital planning reflects institutional mission and goals as they relate to its capital facilities requests and equipment acquisitions. The university demonstrates consistency between its core theme objectives and its capital planning, particularly as it relates to, Core Themes 2 and 3.

Given a reasonable debt coverage ratio, debt for capital outlay does not appear to create a drain on resources that should otherwise be allocated to educational mission of the institution. The institution's internal capital planning processes, external policies, procedures and oversight by the Montana University System, as well as state oversight from OCHE and BOR, reinforce that debt determinations are carefully reviewed, justified, and conservatively controlled. [2.F.5]

The university demonstrates that operational budgets, expenses, accounting processes and indebtedness by campus auxiliaries and educational and general (E&G) operations are independent of each other. The university reports that Auxiliaries do not receive funding support from E&G budgets and that the university does not rely on Auxiliary revenues to support E&G operations. Further evidence of institutional independence between E&G and Auxiliary functions, is that auxiliaries are charged for the cost of services provided to them by other university operations. [2.F.6]

The University is audited on a biennial basis by the State of Montana Legislative Audit Division, corresponding with the State biennium legislative assembly process. The audit is a consolidated report containing the aggregated financials of the four campuses that make up the Montana University System. The biennium audit independently reports appropriated financials for each of the two years in the biennium, as well as the year immediately preceding that period. Annual IPEDS reporting by the university corresponds with presentations contained within the State Audit report.

Significant issues impacting specific institutions in the MUS system are found within the Management, Discussion and Analysis section of the audit report. The State Audit report also breaks out individual accounting reports for each independent institutional Foundation. The most recent biennium State Audit report for FY15 does not indicate that there are any accounting deficiencies, nor does it direct management analysis toward any business practices of University of Montana collectively, or Montana Western independently. [2.F.7]

The University maintains a written agreement that establishes the specifics of its relationship between the institution and the Foundation which bears its name. The agreement requires that fundraising activities are conducted to be consistent with State and Federal law and abide by the policies of the Montana University System. The agreement also establishes that the Foundation will maintain and enforce appropriate conflict of interest policies covering Board directors and Foundation personnel. The agreement provides that the Chancellor of the university apprise the Foundation of the institution's needs and priorities, and further pledges the Foundation to act cooperatively with the University to advance those priorities. [2.F.8]

Standard 2.G Physical and Technological Infrastructure

Physical Infrastructure

Consistent with its mission, programs, services, and core themes, the institution maintains the campus to be functional, accessible, safe and secure, and in a manner that promotes healthful learning and productive working environments.

Montana Western employs a collaborative and inclusive planning process through its Development Committee to determine institutional capital improvement and capital development priorities for its facility needs. UMW interactions with the Montana University System, the State of Montana Architecture and Engineering department, and OCHE,

demonstrate that UMW is effectively communicating its needs in a manner that properly aligns its facilities priorities with the University's strategic and tactical direction.

While financial resources appear limiting across all Montana public institutions of higher education at this time, the evaluation committee compliments Montana Western on the cleanliness of its campus and grounds and the high quality of care that was visible throughout the many buildings that the committee toured during its two-day visit. However, in meetings with Montana Western staff, significant concerns were raised about declining levels of state funding support and the impact this has had on staffing levels in Facilities and other areas of UMW. While the Evaluation Committee feels staff expressions of loyalty to the institution and love of the family atmosphere at UMW are sincere, the committee is concerned with the adequacy of UMW staffing levels in areas, such as groundskeepers, and the sustainability of the present working environment over the long term. [2.G.1]

The university is classified as a small quantity generator of hazardous waste, which is primarily generated at chemistry laboratories in Block Hall. Any toxic wastes generated on campus that are manifested for disposal off campus, are handled under the direction of the Environmental and Safety Office (EH&S) at Montana Tech in Butte, Montana. Montana Tech, like Montana Western, is part of the Montana University System. The EH&S office of Montana Tech also provides safety training to the Montana Western community when requested by UMW. Montana Western has adopted the Montana Tech Chemical Hygiene plan, which is an established, published, managed set of policies and procedures that address the proper use, storage, and disposal of hazardous or toxic materials.

The Evaluation Committee is concerned that it was unable to locate the hazardous material plan including "community right to know" disclosures as an attachment to the self-evaluation report, or from any easily accessible link to the UMW home website. Likewise, the UMW self-report appears to focus mainly on sources of hazardous materials located in labs, while not addressing hazardous materials more comprehensively as are found throughout all building and work environments. Evaluators did not conduct a comprehensive inquiry about the ease of policy availability of the written guideline at Block Hall or other locations on campus that generate or utilize hazardous materials. The Evaluation committee suggests that Montana Tech resources be made more accessible to the University of Montana Western community. [2.G.2]

Montana Western updated its Master Plan in December 2015. The comprehensive Master Plan demonstrates evidence that it is integrated with the mission of the institution and its Campus core themes in a number of key areas. The guiding principles of the Master Plan, which is to focus on student needs by improving facilities they utilize, supporting experiential learning, as well as to enhance the campus environment to attract and retain students and faculty are directly related to campus core themes. Stated goals in the Master Plan to improve academic resources by constructing science laboratories and improving campus technology are directly related to Core Theme 3, Objective 2, and which are tracked under Core Theme measures in Indicator 1 Goal 5B and 5C. Likewise, Master Plan Goals #3 and #4, upgrade student life and improve athletic facilities, appear to relate to Core Theme 2, Indicators 1, Goal 5A, and, Indicator 3, Goal 2D, respectively.

Compliment: *Montana Western is complimented for aligning its Master Planning initiative for facilities and environment with its core theme objectives and measurement indicators.*

Like many public institutions, Montana Western collects approved student fees to augment general university funding for the effective replacement and upgrade of equipment to support its institutional functions and mission. Deployment of available resources for institutional equipment is an inclusive process involving multiple university units. Collaboration between a faculty committee and the Provost to distribute proceeds from academic equipment fees ensures that these resource allocations are best directed to meet core theme objectives, and the achievement of goals and intended outcomes of the institutions programs and services. Additionally, the university leveraged available resources to enhance its experiential learning objectives by acquiring new equipment for metabolic measurement, soil-drying equipment for carbon dating and other research needs. The institution has also been able to increase its numbers of vehicles, made necessary by the institution's *Experience One* initiative. [2.G.4]

Technological Infrastructure

The institution indicates that it received assistance from the University of Montana and Charter Communications to provide a ten-fold increase in bandwidth availability to 1G, in 2015. While waiting for Charter Communications to complete the hardware upgrades, UMW reports that it reached 100% saturation during peak usage periods. The institution is in the earliest stages of planning for another potential capacity upgrade to 10G, and is currently experiencing usage of about 35% of its capacity at peak. A possible upgrade to voice over internet protocol (VOIP) to replace its aging conventional telephone infrastructure would be expected to use additional internet capacity. Institutional administrators recognize the challenge they face with regard to another internet capacity upgrade and are currently working on strategies to avoid delays that occurred with the previous capacity upgrade. [2.G.5]

Through its Helpdesk functions, targeted training workshops, instruction from the Director of eLearning on the UMW use of Moodle, and computer classes offered by the department of Business & Technology, the university provides appropriate instruction in the effective uses of campus technology systems in support of academic pursuits and operational functions to its students, faculty and staff. [2.G.6]

The university employs a Technology Steering Committee, with institutionally inclusive membership, to ensure that planning of technology infrastructure provides opportunities for input across all university constituencies who rely on technology for operations, programs, and services. [2.G.7]

The university optimizes its technological resources by employing a three-year rotational replacement plan for individual-application technologies. The rotational system prioritizes institutional constituencies, with placement of its highest emphasis on students and instruction. UMW has aggressively increased instructional classroom media by 60% over the last four years. UMW's inclusive planning and strategic rotational replacement procedures ensure that university technological infrastructure is adequate to support its operations, academic pursuits, programs, and services. [2.G.8]

STANDARD THREE -- PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Standard 3.A Institutional Planning

Planning has been extensive and comprehensive, inclusive of a wide-range of partners over multiple years, particularly for the Strategic Plan and its related Tactical Document. There have been opportunities for input by the appropriate constituencies and the planning process is indeed broad-based (3.A.1., 3.A.2). Results of planning, largely via the Tactical Document, are shared broadly and made available to appropriate constituencies (3.A.1). In terms of planning being purposeful, systematic and integrated to lead to fulfillment of its mission (3.A.1), there is room for improvement. [3.A.1-2]

Extensive data as part of planning has been emphasized more recently. For example, the Central Data Area was created in the spring of 2017. Data that was used in the creation of the last strategic plan were surveys of staff, faculty and students, along with focus group input. However, the ongoing use of data to inform planning is not clearly connected to the evaluation of mission fulfillment. [3.A.3]

Compliment: *The Evaluation Committee recognizes the recent, strong improvement in data collection and organization in the Central Data Area.*

Concern: *The institution's planning process does not clearly lead to mission fulfillment, nor is it clearly informed by the collection of appropriately defined data that can be analyzed and used to evaluate mission fulfillment. [3.A.1; 3.A.3].*

Resource allocation and application of institutional capacity is well-connected to planning priorities. As the Budget Committee and the Academic and Administrative Council work closely together along with the Strategic Planning Committee, this provides a method for UMW to have planning help guide decisions on resource allocation and institutional capacity. [3.A.4]

UMW has been active in emergency management planning, including working with external partners such as the County Sheriff's Department and DES Emergency Planning Officer. They have an Emergency Operations Plan. They are working with the University of Montana Affiliation for policies and procedures to mitigate interruption of normal operations. [3.A.5]

3.B Core Theme Planning

The University of Montana Western engages in core theme planning as exhibited by the inclusion of core themes in the Strategic Plan, Tactical Document, and the Academic Assessment Plans. However, the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report does not clearly define the extent to which the core themes are central to the process; the lack of clear alignment between the Strategic Plan and the core themes is at the root of the confusion. Although the Tactical Document indicates the associated core themes for some individual tactics, it is not apparent that the tactics flow from the core themes. [3.B.1]

An example of the less than clear guidance between core theme planning and achievement of

goals can be seen in Core Theme Three. For Core Theme Three, planning has focused on three objectives (Priorities 4, 5, and 6). Priority 6 is clearly and strongly aligned with the core theme. Priorities 4 and 5 are less clearly defined and less clearly aligned with the core theme. The component of Core Theme Three that does not seem to be represented in Priorities 4, 5, and 6 is that of “Foster responsibility” and therefore it is not clear that the core themes fully guide the selection of programs and services. [3.B.1-2]

The planning process that resulted in the Strategic Plan, which included mention of core themes, was informed by data collection. Accomplishment of core theme/strategic plan objectives was sometimes informed by data. [3.B.3]

Compliment: *UMW has achieved significant growth in its capacity for data collection over the past five years.*

Concern: *The alignment between core themes and indicators of achievement is less than clear, and core theme planning could be more clearly aligned to achievement of goals and outcomes. Although capacity for data collection has improved, it is not always apparent that the data collected is appropriately aligned or defined for the intended outcomes.* [3.B.2-3]

STANDARD FOUR -- EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT

4.A Assessment

Overall, UMW has engaged the entire campus and placed a great deal of emphasis on assessment in the last several years. The progress made, particularly since 2014, is impressive. A strong foundation of data collection has been established (4.A.1 and 4.A.3). For example, there is evidence that faculty have generally embedded course learning outcomes in course syllabi, and this represents an important milestone in fostering an evidence-based culture. Not surprisingly given the relative early stage of assessment development, the meaningfulness of the data is inconsistent because of some conflation of goals and indicators and, as the Chancellor describes, the Tactical Document is overly complicated. Furthermore, as the systems mature, it is likely the inconsistencies will be mitigated. The Chancellor’s expressed plan to simplify and align mission, core themes, goals, and indicators in the forthcoming strategic planning effort should improve evaluation of its programs and services (4.A.2). The Committee notes that “goals” are not “indicators” for metrics. In addition, many of the indicators are unclear and indirect measures of outcomes that may not lead to improvement.

In regard to evaluating systems for alignment and integration, it is important to underscore how much has been accomplished in such a short period of time at UMW. The University has instituted a strong foundation for holistic alignment, however at this early stage the evaluations are inconsistent. The Chancellor has indicated the need for aligning, clarifying, and simplifying assessment processes and reports (4.A.4 and 4.A.5). Relatively new leadership in the Chancellor and Provost offices has spurred important reflection on existing assessment processes. [4.A.1-6]

4.B Improvement

Clearly the institution has significant engagement with the Tactical Document and the university community is using this to inform planning and decision making. The Tactical Document is also used to inform constituencies about results. UMW is to be commended for this involvement. The Tactical Document provides some of the indicators of achievement for the core themes. However, as the tactics are not consistently aligned with core themes, and, more importantly, as the tactics do not often have direct measures that would provide meaningful measures of achievement of the core themes, the Evaluation Committee is concerned. [4.B.1]

The Evaluation Committee found that the institution uses the assessment of student learning to enhance student learning. There are regular faculty meetings to discuss improvements needed. However, connecting those discussions to the results of assessment of student learning outcomes leaves room for improvement. [4.B.2]

3.B, 4.A, 4.B Core Theme Planning, Assessment, and Improvement

Introduction/Summary Section for Core Theme Planning, Assessment, and Improvement

It is clear from the UMW Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report and supporting documents as well as from the Peer-Evaluation visit that several themes have emerged. First, UMW has made outstanding progress in creating a culture of evidence-based assessment since the 2014 Commission letter that indicated in Recommendation 1 that UMW had not embraced assessment throughout the curriculum. Expansive data collection, committee review processes, and communication systems have been implemented. Second, conflation of goals and indicators has made meaningful assessment challenging with equally challenging implications for core theme planning and improvement. In what follows, each Core Theme is introduced with findings on the cycle of planning, assessment, and improvement.

Core Theme One: Continuously Improve Undergraduate Education and Experiential Learning

Introduction

Core Theme One is Continuously Improve Undergraduate Education and Experiential Learning. It clearly supports the University's mission and has received significant attention in planning and assessment over the past several years.

Core Theme One Planning

Priority One in the Strategic Plan (encourage academic excellence and innovation) reflects Core Theme One, which is focused on improving undergraduate education and experiential learning. The Strategic Plan serves as a comprehensive plan to guide programs and services for the institution. [3.B.1-2] Data and progress on Strategic Plan priorities and core theme objectives are outlined in the Tactical Document, although this document is not comprehensive in tracking all the core theme measures. [3.B.3] Some of the data for the theme is focused on compliance with

assessment of student learning outcomes in GE courses and across programs as well as implementing experiential learning and high impact practices. Assessment reports, for the most part, indicate that assessment is occurring, and that improvements are being made in a range of areas. [3.B.3]

In several cases, the measures for the core theme describe "to do" items rather than actual ways to collect data that would inform the institution if the goal (indicator) has been met and progress made related to the theme. Several of the measures appear to be inputs, which, while they are a step toward achieving the goals, do not actually measure achievement. The count of GE syllabi with ELOs listed, for example, is an input and doesn't measure if the goal to "equip students with the knowledge and skills that inspire them to be civic-minded and enable them to lead" has been met. The NSSE is a more direct measure even though it is self-reported data. It provides a more specific means of determining if progress has been made. One of the measures for delivering experiential learning through technology is a student survey. Results of the survey are not shared and the survey itself is a general survey of all campus services. Similarly, engaging students, faculty, and staff in meaningful experiential learning activities is measured primarily by counts of participation. [3.B.3] In general, measures are listed as being met with no discussion or analysis of the results in terms of improving programs and learning.

The faculty developed a definition of experiential learning in an all-day retreat a few years ago and came to collective agreement. However, students sometimes misunderstand what it is and interpret it as involving field trips and not having formal classroom instruction. Due to this, the term "hands-on" is objected to as being misleading. Also, experiential learning is applied somewhat differently depending on the discipline, but faculty members were able to articulate how it works in their areas. Faculty are extremely supportive of experiential learning and block scheduling. This includes long-time faculty as well as those attracted to the university because of this approach.

Core Theme One Assessment

One aspect of Core Theme One is focused on academic programs and achieving student learning outcomes. Processes are in place for the assessment of student learning outcomes with specific examples of findings and resulting actions in the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. The institution has provided resources and training to build capacity in this area and is working to address gaps. [4.A.3]

Program learning assessment is characterized by sharing and discussion of information between the committees responsible (e.g., Academic Assessment Committee and the GE Committee, both of which consist of faculty members) and department faculty. [4.A.2] The LEAP ELOs and program outcomes are included in the catalog and syllabi; however, they are not included in degree planning worksheets as stated in the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. Faculty are also represented on planning committees such as the Academic & Administrative Council, which oversees the Tactical Document.

The GE and Academic Assessment Committees submit reports regarding progress on assessment of student outcomes. These reports are primarily logistical about the activities of the committees

rather than providing verifiable data or examples of closing the loop. The GE Committee report also indicates that some faculty are still unfamiliar with the LEAP ELOs. [4.A.1-3]

Faculty consider that they support the core themes by what they do in the classroom and with program learning outcomes assessment. They pointed out that the core themes are broad, but that they are familiar with them and feel they are supporting core theme achievement. The university has recently developed new questions on the student evaluation forms, which focus on experiential learning. The Academic Assessment Committee feels that these will provide good feedback.

The Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report mentions state-required program reviews as evidence of assessment processes. These reports contain primarily enrollment, graduation, and placement information. Specific learning outcomes assessment information is shared for the English program but is absent for other programs. [4.A.2-3]

Although measures for each of the goals related to Core Theme One are indicated, and several of these measures have been "met," except in a few cases, the measures are inputs rather than showing meaningful results that lead to achievement. [4.A.6]

Core Theme One Improvement

UMW has three objectives for Core Theme One. Each objective has one or more indicators, which are worded as goals. Measures and outcomes for each indicator/goal focus on planning, the use of resources, and capacity building to accomplish the core theme. However, measures and outcomes are not transparently or directly related to the stated indicator or goal, but rather are listings of tasks that will help the university accomplish the goals. As such, they are not true measures or actual indicators. That being said, the examples provided in the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report offer evidence that Core Theme One is being addressed through planning and assessment in order to make improvements.

Justification for the creation of the Ecology BS program was based on internal student interest and graduation data as well as national trends, and aims to better prepare students for graduate degrees in medical and veterinary sciences. Similarly, the proposal for the Glass Program was well-thought out as was the Health and Human Performance Lab. The latter is specifically connected to experiential learning and institutional mission. The additional initiatives listed as examples are also supportive of experiential learning. [1.B.1] The Poindexter Slough Project, Colt Sale, Rural Fridays, and Model Classroom are all evidences of how planning and resources are being utilized to expand capacity for institutional fulfillment.

The changes in developmental math and English are solid examples of program improvements based on assessment and review (Indicator 3) and are commendable. [1.B.1] Similarly, processes for the discussion of GE learning outcomes, Teaching Development Committee initiatives, and participation in the Association of College and University Educators course are noteworthy endeavors supportive of achievement of the core theme. The NSSE data is strong and longitudinal data will be helpful. Attention to high impact practices currently and those planned

are also commendable. However, measures must be implemented to determine if these inputs, resources, and investments are resulting in program improvements.

However, as mentioned earlier, many of the measures are inputs. Interim steps taken and completed in order to achieve goals are not evidence of effective planning, alignment of resources, collection of data, and analysis in order to make desired improvements. Additionally, the report indicates that several outcomes have been met but provides no evidence. In sum, terminology, measures, and outcomes must be reviewed. [4.A.4-6]

Compliment: *Much progress has been made in the area of GE and program learning outcome assessment. Resources and training have been committed to identified areas related to Core Theme One in order to improve experiential learning and academic programs. Faculty, staff, students, and administrators are committed to and enthusiastic about experiential learning. In many cases, it is what attracted them to UMW and what keeps them there.*

Core Theme Two: Maximize Campus-wide Support for Student Success and Completion

Introduction

UMW's mission is clearly supported by Core Theme Two: Maximize Campus-wide Support for Student Success and Completion. This core theme has six objectives which are largely equivalent to Strategic Plan priorities. This core theme has received significant attention in planning and assessment over the past several years.

Core Theme Two Planning

Core Theme Two's six objectives are well-represented in the Strategic Plan's Priorities 2-7. The Strategic Plan serves as a comprehensive plan to guide programs and services for the institution. [3.B.1-2] Data and progress on Strategic Plan priorities and core theme objectives are outlined in the Tactical Document, although this document is not comprehensive in tracking all the core theme measures. [3.B.3]

As in Core Theme One, the Core Theme Two data measures often describe "to do" items rather than actual ways to collect data that would inform the institution if the goal (indicator) has been met and progress made related to the objective and the core theme. Several of the measures appear to be inputs, which, while they are a step toward achieving the goals, do not actually measure achievement. For example, Core Theme Two, Objective 1 (Priority 2) is: Develop, strengthen, and expand co-curricular programs and campus collaboration to promote student learning, development, retention, and success. Measures being used to evaluate achievement of that priority include task lists such as: record of annual projects and accomplishments of the Academic and Administrative Council; purchase and develop an online catalog; and, document number of faculty and staff who attend all campus and/or mandatory campus meetings. UMW has some measures that begin to provide appropriate data to inform the institution if the goal has been met are ones such as: track headcount, retention, and graduation rates of students who participate in TRiO program; increase first year and transfer student retention rates. In general,

measures are listed as being met with no discussion or analysis of the results in terms of improving programs and services. [3.B.3]

Core Theme Two Assessment

UMW has initiated data collections for indicators for Core Theme Two in areas such as alumni recruiting, experiential education success, diversity and recruitment. Many data collection measures are in place. IPEDS graduation rates and outcomes measures have been utilized in gathering student success data. The NSSE “service learning” scale is used to benchmark and compare the university's athletic and other non-curricular programs. A student satisfaction survey is conducted by the Residence and Life Department. The data findings are discussed and shared in many different meeting groups. However, it is not clear how the data is consistently shared or utilized though certainly there is intermittent availability of the data, and in some cases, such as the NSSE survey, regular use of that data.

Core Theme Two Improvement

UMW has provided a number of examples of improvement related to Core Theme Two. The following are a few examples of that improvement, with details of how the example connects to Standard 4.B.

An objective of Core Theme Two (Priority 2) is to “Develop, strengthen, and expand co-curricular programs and campus collaboration to promote student learning, development, retention, and success” and one of the indicators used is Indicator 4 (Goal 2E) “demonstrate the power of experiential education by achieving greater student success than comparator institutions.” One of the metrics they use for this indicator is to “increase IPEDS six-year graduation rates by 2% each year.” UMW has succeeded at this goal. Another metric used is “Performance-based Funding” (receiving funds from the state based on state performance metrics) and UMW has succeeded in this as well. UMW does use Core Theme Two metrics to inform planning and decision-making, and allocation of resources and capacity, and, through various committees they make the assessments available to appropriate constituencies. [4.B.1] As noted earlier, some of the indicators used to measure achievement are not direct measures of achievement of the objective which makes it difficult to have “meaningful ... indicators of achievement.” [4.B.1.a]. For example, receiving funds from the state for performance metrics does not directly define achievement of this objective of Core Theme Two. However, as the performance metrics are direct measures of student retention (among other things), they could be viewed as a measure of achievement.

One objective of Core Theme Two is to “maintain residential and co-curricular spaces that are safe, functional, environmentally responsible, and marketable” [Core Theme Two, Objective 4 (Priority 5), Indicator 1 (Goal 5A)]. As a result, improvements were made to Mathews Hall and further improvements are underway. As the Evaluation Committee met with different UMW committees, it became clear that the institution does use metrics to inform planning and decision-making, and allocation of resources and capacity. Through various committees, the institution makes the assessments available to appropriate constituencies; the Evaluation Committee perceived this process to take place via somewhat informal communication networks. [4.B.1]

UMW uses the NSSE “Service-Learning” scale to benchmark and compare UMW with other colleges of its kind [Objective 1 (Priority 2), Indicator 3 (Goal 2D)]. Although a variety of information is tracked (e.g., students participating in athletic programs; classes with service learning component), the results do not appear to be fully analyzed and shared out to help create or inform the next steps.

Of special note, UMW has made great strides in increasing the six-year graduation rate. This data is used in various places as a measure of success.

Although the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report and other documents provided by the institution reflect abundant data collected for each objective, it is unclear how the data is analyzed and utilized and connected to the achievement of the objectives of the Core Theme. [3.B.3; 4.B.1]

Compliment: *Faculty, staff, and most importantly students enthusiastically expressed the strong sense of caring present on campus. This positive relationality appears to undergird the student success efforts.*

Compliment: *UMW uses ongoing and systematic planning in the selection of programs and services.*

Core Theme Three: Foster Responsible Campus Efficiency and Stewardship of Resources

Introduction

Core Theme Three is related to the concept of “sustaining” in the UMW mission, in that efficient use of resources will help the institution sustain its educational activities. In discussions with Facilities, Information Technology, and Budget teams, it is clear that UMW is focused on campus efficiency and stewardship of resources and that this is a regular discussion in annual and long-term planning. The institution has identified three objectives for Core Theme Three and each has goals, some of which are aligned with Core Theme Three.

Core Theme Three Planning

The Strategic Plan reflects Core Theme Three in that three of the Strategic Plan priorities (Priority 4, 5, and 6) connect, at least in part, with Core Theme Three. In the Strategic Plan, each of the Priorities has three or more goals and some of these goals are used as part of core theme planning. The Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report refers to the goals as indicators and then each has two or more metrics. Planning is largely consistent with the comprehensive plan and is used to guide operations. [3.B.1, 3.B.2]

Core Theme Three Assessment

In most cases, the indicators/goals and their measures for Core Theme Three describe "to do" items rather than data that could be analyzed and used to evaluate accomplishment of Core

Theme Three objectives. For example, Core Theme Three, Objective 1(Priority 4), Indicator 2 (Goal 4D) has measures of 1) update changes to the Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2) meet salaries compared to peer markets, 3) complete IPEDS annual report, and 4) complete the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA) survey. These are input measures and do not provide data that could be used to evaluate accomplishment of the Priority, to attract and retain highly-qualified faculty and staff [3.B.3; 4.A.1; 4.A.6]; output measures are needed to measure accomplishment.

The Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report discusses a number of assessment measures that are not measures referenced in the planning documents. For example, Performance Funding metrics via the MUS has been a successful process for UMW's achievement of Core Theme Three (and is also related to Core Theme One). The Committee suggests that UMW might wish to align Performance Funding metrics as part of Core Theme planning and assessment in the future.

Core Theme Three Improvement

As there is unclear data sometimes being used to evaluate accomplishment of the Priorities/Core Theme Three objectives, it is difficult to evaluate Standard 4.B. That being said, the examples provided in the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report and in on-campus discussions offer evidence that Core Theme Three is being addressed through planning and assessment with the goal of making improvements. And there have been improvements. For example, there has been consistent and positive effort to improve faculty salaries over time. While it is unclear if that has affected the desired outcome (increased retention and recruitment of faculty), UMW has been working towards its goals by informed planning, decision-making, and allocation of resources, as well as communicating results to appropriate constituencies. [4.B.1]

Concern: *UMW's selection of data and evidence is too indirect to provide appropriately defined data by which to evaluate the achievement of goals or intended outcomes and to clearly inform core theme planning and planning for programs and services.* [3.B.3]

Concern: *It is not clear for some of the data collected whether the information is meaningful or appropriate to the indicators. Although strong capacity and systems for assessment have been implemented, it is not clear that they appraise authentic achievements or yield meaningful results that lead to improvement. Careful attunement of processes and closing the loop of continuous improvement are needed.* [4.A.1; 4.A.6]

Concern: *Many of the indicators are unclear and indirect measures of outcomes and therefore do not serve to provide meaningful institutionally identified indicators of achievement by which to assess core themes, programs and services. It is difficult, therefore, to see how the institution uses the results of core theme assessment and the assessment of programs and services to make improvements.* [4.B.1]

STANDARD FIVE -- MISSION FULFILLMENT, ADAPTATION, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Standard 5.A Mission Fulfillment

In the report, the institution outlines a set of regular, systematic, participatory, self-reflective, and evidence-based assessment activities that contribute to the institutional assessment of its accomplishments: academic assessment, the implementation of the Tactical Document, the achievement of administrative employee goals as they relate to the core themes and the Strategic Plan and the achievement of administrative department goals as they relate to the mission and Strategic Plan.

The Tactical Document serves as the centerpiece of institutional assessment. The Academic and Administrative Council (AAC) maintains the Tactical Document and the documentation supporting the strategic planning priorities and goals. The AAC operationalizes the projects in the document, connecting with the appropriate units regarding each item's status and outcomes. The AAC serves as the communication node, moving information down to units and back up from units.

To the best the committee can understand it, the University of Montana Western defines mission fulfillment as making progress on the Tactical Document, i.e. actions aimed to achieve the priorities and goals of the Strategic Plan *Experience the Difference*. Because the priorities and goals of the Strategic Plan are mapped to the core theme objectives and indicators, and because the Strategic Plan operationalizes *Experience One*, the achievement of the Strategic Plan priorities and goals appear to equate to mission fulfillment.

The committee's understanding from Standard Five of the report is that the number of metrics from the Tactical Document that have been met provide evidence of the extent of mission fulfillment. However, because there are no established targets or thresholds of achievement, it is not clear how the institution determined what percentage of achieved metrics indicates mission fulfillment.

Concern: *The Evaluation Committee is concerned that the approach to institutional assessment is so convoluted that it is difficult to use it to make determinations of quality, effectiveness, and mission fulfillment that can then be communicated to appropriate constituencies and the public. Future plans to simplify the metrics should help UMW in this respect. [5.A.1; 5.A.2]*

Standard 5.B Adaptation and Sustainability

The institution has implemented a clear framework for adjusting its strategic objectives and to bring intended goals to fruition through creation, monitoring, and modification of its tactical initiatives. At the culmination of its most recent seven-year accreditation cycle, the institution is positioning itself to initiate new planning that will adjust, amend, or improve its strategic direction relative to resource allocation and application of its available capacity.

The impetus behind institutional tactical planning is through the Academic and Administrative Council (AAC), and its production of the university's tactical document. Membership of AAC is comprised of appropriate university constituencies to ensure that the institution might readily adapt to the continuously changing internal and external environments, and with ability to remain an efficient and sustainable operation over time.

The AAC consists of substantial cross-membership with other vital and strategic institutional committees, such as the Budget Committee and the Strategic Planning Committee. With effective steering of committees by senior UMW administrators, the institution demonstrates a capability to evaluate the adequacy of its resources and capacity. Additionally, university administrative and management structures possess the capability to effectively document and evaluate potential for mission fulfillment, accomplishment of core themes, and to attain the intended outcomes of its programs, services and indicators of achievement.

However, critical institutional committees that provide the necessary synthesis of information from monitoring outcomes of the university's tactical initiatives appear to lack a complete understanding of their functions relative to individual committee responsibility, expected interworking relationships with other committees, and with the administration. Few committee members, when asked by the Evaluation Committee, were able to clearly articulate the charge of their group, and at times there were disagreements between members regarding that charge.

The Evaluation Committee has measured concern with the appearance of a slightly disjointed set of committees that appear to facilitate continuous improvement planning by happenstance, perhaps due to having a high occurrence of cross-membership between committees. Holistic institutional direction also appears to exist at UMW, mostly due to the strong vision of senior leadership, which is clearly signaling that continuous improvement means moving forward innovatively with experiential learning as opposed to relying on it as a completed task or past success.

The Evaluation Committee tempers its critique by acknowledging that 1) Its onsite observations were limited to only two days; 2) That there have been two significant administrative changes during the current seven-year accreditation cycle; 3) That the Evaluation Committee specifically requested that UMW Committee Chairs were not present during committee interviews, as committee chairs had been interviewed about their administrative and committee roles previously, and the Evaluation Committee wanted to speak with working members of the committees independent of these senior administrative personnel; and 4) That the most recent administrative changes have occurred in the last few years.

The Evaluation Committee does recognize and commend UMW for effectively adapting to changes within its external environment. By regularly reviewing the adequacy of its resources, capacity, and effectiveness of its operations in adjusting to ongoing State budget cuts, Montana Western has maintained a strong commitment to its students and the institution's primary differentiating characteristic, experiential learning.

As UMW moves forward into the next accreditation cycle, the Evaluation Committee encourages UMW to facilitate the participation of faculty and staff, through the various governance processes, in "reviewing and revising, as necessary UMW's mission, core themes, core theme

objectives, goals or intended outcomes of its program and services, and indicators of achievement.” [5.B.1-3]

COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The University of Montana Western’s faculty, staff, students, alumni, and Board members took the time to meet with the evaluators and conveyed a strong appreciation for *Experience One* and its impact on student success as defined both quantitatively and qualitatively. That a commitment to students is core to the institution’s identity was passionately conveyed and convincingly articulated throughout the two days of interviews. The campus visit confirmed that UMW successfully differentiates itself through *Experience One*.

As the institution moves forward with developing its next strategic plan and as it enters its next accreditation cycle, it is poised to deepen its own understanding of the value and meaningfulness of this work.

Commendations

1. The Evaluation Committee commends UMW as an innovative campus with a focus on student success.
2. The Evaluation Committee commends UMW for effectively adapting to changes within its external environment. By regularly reviewing the adequacy of its resources, capacity, and effectiveness of its operations in adjusting to ongoing State budget cuts, Montana Western has maintained a strong commitment to its students and the institution’s primary differentiating characteristic, experiential learning.
3. The Evaluation Committee commends the positive, strong spirit of relationship building on campus and with external partners.
4. The Evaluation Committee commends the UMW faculty and staff for their energy and passion around supporting students.
5. The Evaluation Committee commends the UMW faculty for their progress on the assessment of student learning.
6. The Evaluation Committee commends UMW for its significant growth in its capacity for data collection and progress on institutional research.

Recommendations

1. In order to make judgements about mission fulfillment, there needs to be a clear definition of mission fulfillment, as well as a clearly outlined method for determining the extent to which the mission has been achieved. The Evaluation Committee recommends that as the institution maintains or changes its mission moving forward, it clearly defines mission fulfillment and articulates institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment. [1.A.2; 5.A.1; 5.A.2]

2. Based on the self-study and interviews with the institution's community, greater clarity is needed around the use of indicators to inform the ongoing evaluation of the institution's accomplishment of its core themes and the use of that evaluation for improvement. The Evaluation Committee recommends that as the institution maintains or changes its core themes and objectives moving forward, it identifies meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement that form the basis for evaluating accomplishment of the objectives of its core themes *and* the institution regularly reviews its assessment processes to ensure they appraise authentic achievements and yield meaningful results that lead to improvement. [1.B.2; 4.A.6]
3. The Evaluation Committee recommends the institution engage in ongoing, systematic collection and analysis of meaningful, assessable, and verifiable data as the basis for evaluating the accomplishment of its core theme objectives. [4.A.1]
4. The alignment between core themes and indicators of achievement needs more clarity. The Evaluation Committee recommends core theme planning to be more clearly aligned to achievement of goals and outcomes. Core theme planning should be informed by the collection of appropriately defined data that are analyzed and used to evaluate accomplishment of core theme objectives. [3.B.1; 3.B.2; 3.B.3]