

# **Year One Peer-Evaluation Report**

## **Northwest Indian College**

**Bellingham, Washington**

**March 1 - May 20, 2011**

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

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## Evaluation Committee

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## **Introduction**

Northwest Indian College is a tribally controlled baccalaureate level college located in Bellingham, Washington. The college was established in 1989. Prior to this name change, the college operated as the Lummi Indian School of Aquaculture, which was established in 1974. The college received initial accreditation in 1993 at the two-year degree level and then, following another full-scale self study and visit, received accreditation as a four-year institution in 2010. The total headcount enrollment in 2010 was 1,132.

## **Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report**

A three-person peer-evaluation team from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities conducted a Year One Peer-Evaluation of Northwest Indian College in an off-site virtual environment from March 1 – May 20, 2011. The review was conducted via a pre-review conference call, a shared draft of the initial evaluation report via email, and a panel-wide review of the final evaluation report via conference call and email.

The Evaluation Committee was supplied with both an electronic and a hard copy of the college's Year One Report, along with a hard copy of its 2010-2011 College Catalog in advance of the Commission's deadline. The evaluation panel found the report to be well written but to be lacking clarity in some areas.

## **Report on Eligibility Requirements**

As stated in its Year One Report, Northwest Indian College operates and awards degrees as a baccalaureate level college and is "governed by an elected Board of Directors and a Board of Trustees from within the college district." In November of 2010 a strategic plan was adopted and an assessment plan is currently under review and will be updated by 2012. Based on information provided in the report, it is unclear if the current mission has been formally approved by the Board of Directors or Board of Trustees, although it was adopted by the college in 2004.

The first year report produced by Northwest Indian College presents a concise plan for assessing its core themes. It appears that a large amount of effort has taken place to formulate a number of processes to ensure that data is collected and used for improvement.

The evaluation team feels that the vision for assessment is clear as indicated by the following statement from the report: "This model attempts to close the loop between data collection, analysis, and application of improved strategies." This vision is a positive starting point for success.

The report shows that the plan for assessment is clear. It presents a commitment to the continued use of the assessment cycle to drive the institution toward its stated goals. The major components of the plan appear complete but there is a lack of specificity regarding the mechanics of each core theme. The alignment of each component of the process is also unclear.

From the review of the documents provided by Northwest Indian College, it appears that they have addressed both eligibility requirements. The report suggests that they have achieved this within the scope of the year one evaluation. Further discussion concerning the Eligibility Requirements will be provided below as Standard One is addressed.

### **Report on Standard 1.A Mission**

Northwest Indian College has formulated an assessment plan using the following levels: Mission, Core Themes, Core Theme Objectives, Acceptable Threshold, and Evaluation of Fulfillment/Indicators of Achievement. They have also included a series of goals. This approach provides a clear framework for evaluation. Northwest Indian College is to be complimented on their efforts to formalize a framework for the accreditation cycle. Overall, it appears that they have a workable and comprehensive plan in place to guide the institution in the future. However, there are several areas where the panel felt that there was room for improvement and the observations below are presented to help improve the clarity of the process for the college and for future evaluators.

One section that seems to be out of alignment is the Core Theme Objectives/ Institutional Goals. Although the panel feels that these are appropriate goals for the institution, it was not clear how they fit in with the core themes or the indicators of achievement used for assessment. Some coupling of these goals to the rest of the process would clarify the entire process.

### **Report on Standard 1.B Core Themes**

Northwest Indian College has adopted four core themes.

Core Theme One concerns the “engagement of indigenous knowledge.” Northwest Indian College has developed an impressive integrated approach to having students engage indigenous knowledge. Having each course use this integrated approach and requiring each program to have a language component is a verifiable way to ensure all students are exposed to required indigenous knowledge. It appears that a student cannot go through the program without meeting this objective.

However, the exact levels of achievement for this core theme are not clear. The rationale section of the report indicates that the institution feels that there are assessable and meaningful measures that will be used to obtain data, but the details

are not provided. This core theme can be measured by the assessment tools listed, but an explanation of what constitutes mission fulfillment is not clear in all areas. Further, an explanation of the minimum acceptable threshold is not presented.

Core Theme Two concerns a “commitment to student success.” The majority of the measures for this core theme are internal and designed to have students succeed in educational programs. The supporting evaluation plan appears to measure this sufficiently with one exception. One of the external implied goals is that students will be successful in using their acquired knowledge or degrees once they leave the institution. There is no measure provided that will ensure that the completion of a program leads to external success and that can validate the effectiveness of the programs. However, some data listed in Core Theme Three might help evaluate the effectiveness of programs and, therefore, Core Theme Two. It is suggested that work be done to find verifiable measurements that will show the value of the educational programs in areas external to the college.

Core Theme Three concerns “access to higher education opportunities at all levels for the Tribal Communities.” In this section it is difficult to understand if the indicators for achievement of the objectives listed are new indicators, or a report of past levels of success. It is also difficult to determine the institutions threshold for success. For instance, one indicator is, “Student participation in career ladder opportunities: 70% of students or higher continue or return for next step on career ladder.” Is this a target for an acceptable level performance or a reporting of a current condition? It is difficult to understand exactly what is being measured, what the expectations are, and how the results will be used to improve. The college is encouraged to add clarity regarding what is going to be used to assess areas and when indicating acceptable levels of achievement. In its present form, the structure is vague and the indicators do not align clearly with the objectives.

Core Theme Four concerns “advancing place-based community education and outreach.” This section is much clearer regarding the expectations of the institution. The indicators suggest a verifiable increase in the area being measured. However, as is that case with Core Theme Three, this theme is still vague concerning the level of improvement that is expected. A clearer explanation of expectations and acceptable levels of achievement would improve the assessment process.

## **Summary**

In summary, Northwest Indian College has a workable plan to assess its programs and to utilize the assessment data to make improvements. They are to be complimented on their clear vision. However, the panel strongly encourages Northwest Indian College to examine the above-mentioned concerns and to make improvements for the Year Three Peer Evaluation Report and Visit. The institution is encouraged to add clarity regarding what the measurement tools will be, what the expectations are, and what the acceptable threshold of achievement will be for each

measure. The institution is also encouraged to ensure that the measurement tools and objectives are clearly aligned to ensure that they provided the needed data.

## Commendations

**Commendations:**

**None**

## Recommendations

**Recommendations:**

**None**