

## Outcome of Year-seven Visit: Draft NWCCU Year 7 Peer-evaluation Report

May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024

### Context

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024, a team of peer evaluators assigned by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) conducted a site visit to Western Washington University (WWU) as part of the “Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness”, the core component of the reaffirmation of institutional accreditation that takes place every seven years. The team was well prepared and had thoroughly reviewed the WWU [Self-study](#) that was submitted to NWCCU in February. The team chair, Dr. Carol Long, provided WWU a draft of the team’s recommendations on April 19<sup>th</sup>, and the university provided a response to that document on April 29<sup>th</sup>. The feedback we provided was incorporated into the report, which was then forwarded to NWCCU.

### Draft Report Summary

The draft report includes four commendations that highlight areas where WWU is meeting the standards for accreditation very well, and four recommendations for areas where improvement is needed. In all cases, the draft report indicates that WWU is meeting the standards for accreditation.

#### **Commendation 1:**

*WWUs re-envisioning and branding of general education through GURs is an excellent demonstration of faculty collaboration and engagement in continuous improvement with a focus on students and 21st century skills.*

#### **Commendation 2:**

*The evaluation team commends the institution's work for its the level of detail, transparency, and clarity provided on the Institutional Effectiveness dashboards.*

#### **Commendation 3:**

*Western Washington University demonstrates its commitment to student success through effective programs and services serving diverse student needs provided by a team of professionals across the institution. Development of a new enrollment and student services led strategic plan; restructured offices to form the Access, Diversity Equity & Inclusion unit and the establishment of the new academic advising and student achievement center are recent key initiatives.*

**Commendation 4:**

*WWU faculty engage in the review of regular and substantive interaction (RSI) for all course modalities, having identified key components of RSI that not only meet the baseline requirements, but provide students with critical content, peer, and faculty engagement for the selected modality.*

**Recommendation 1:**

*The evaluation team recommends that the institution publish the expected program and degree learning outcomes for all degrees, certificates, and credentials. (Standard 1.C.3)*

Notes: While all degrees have established learning outcomes, we've not, to this point, included them in the university catalog or any other place that would be easily accessed by students. Rectifying this is fairly straightforward.

**Recommendation 2:**

*The evaluation team recommends the university develop processes to ensure that assessment activities are completed, and reports submitted and archived to increase the effectiveness of its system of assessment through increased accountability and quality assurance. (1.C.5)*

Notes: the draft NWCCU report text provided a great deal of detailed feedback on our current assessment system, and their critiques were found to be largely accurate. Our highly decentralized system for assessing learning at the degree level is showing signs of age, and would benefit from a top-to-bottom review by faculty and WWU academic affairs leadership.

**Recommendation 3:**

*The evaluation team recommends that the institution review and revise the assessment of general education, including assessment of General University Requirements to encompass all courses for each literacy with a more condensed assessment cycle. Additionally, the outcomes for the Fairhaven Core curriculum should be published and systematically assessed. (1.C.6)*

Notes: the assessment plan for the General University Requirements is new as of 2023, and this review provided useful feedback on the approach to, and pace of, assessment activities that will motivate further review by the Committee on Undergraduate Education.

**Recommendation 4:**

*The evaluation team recommends that the institution complete the Facility Master Plan, currently under development, to assist in maintaining physical facilities and technology infrastructure that are accessible, safe, secure, and sufficient in quantity and quality to ensure healthful learning and working environments that support and sustain the institution's mission, academic programs, and services. (2.I.1, 2020 Standards)*

Notes: this recommendation is a carry-over that dates back to the 2017 year-seven review and the 2029 date referenced in the report text reflects the current WWU expectations for when the Facility Master Plan will need to be revised to accommodate future campus growth. We are currently engaged in developing a Capital Development and Strategic Vision Plan that will lay out the campus vision for the next 10-15 years. The Facility Master Plan is a legal document that is developed with the City of Bellingham and creates the limits and expectations for how the university operates its physical facilities.

**Next Steps**

The draft peer-evaluation report is currently undergoing review by staff at NWCCU; we will be provided another opportunity to respond to the document for any remaining errors of fact. It will then go to the NWCCU Board of Commissioners, who are expected to take formal action on the recommendations and the reaffirmation of WWU's accreditation at their meeting on June 18<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>.