Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

Boise State University

Boise, Idaho

Year One Review Report

Fall, 2011

A Confidential Peer-Evaluation Report Prepared for the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities
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Boise State University
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Introduction

On behalf of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the Evaluation Committee conducted a review of the Standard One Report for Boise State University. The committee reviewed the reports from the Comprehensive Review conducted in October 2009, the Commission recommendations to Boise State University in its letter dated January 2010, the Boise State University One Report, and the institutional catalog and website.

The Year One Report addressed Standard One: Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations. The report was provided to committee members in a timely fashion, and the team had adequate time to review the report. The evaluation team found the Year One Report to be well organized, and there was sufficient information provided relative to Standard One.

The report was comprehensive in approach in addressing Standard One. The report also discussed responses to the NWCCU recommendations following the Comprehensive Review Report conducted in October 2009. In addition the report also addressed, in part, Eligibility Requirements.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility Requirement 2: The institution is authorized to operate and award degrees as a higher education institution by the appropriate governmental organization, agency, or governing board as required by the jurisdiction in which it operates.

Boise State University must address the requirement to articulate authorization to operate and award degrees by the appropriate governmental agency or governing board.

Concern: Eligibility requirement 2 is not addressed.

Eligibility Requirement 3: The institution’s mission and core themes are clearly defined and adopted by its governing board(s) consistent with its legal authorization, and are appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education. The institution’s purpose is to serve the educational interests of its students and its principal programs lead to recognized degrees. The institution devotes all, or substantially all, of its resources to support its educational mission and core themes.
The currently approved mission statement for Boise State is focused and provides a clear direction for the institution. The mission is appropriate and focused on the educational interests of students. The mission acknowledges the metropolitan location and unique environment of the University and its constituents.

The mission revision process was inclusive and began by interviewing representatives of various BSU constituents, the results of these interviews were analyzed to identify key ideas that were developed and disseminated through a campus-wide survey. After further revision a draft mission statement was shared with the State Board of Education (SBOE) in June. And the SBOE approved the mission statements in September.

Core themes were developed using the interview and survey responses used in the mission development. Drafts developed by a working group were shared with selected groups at the institution. The report states, “The resulting draft will continue to evolve as we develop our strategic plan and continue to consider our role as an institution.”

Eligibility Requirement 3 is addressed in part, with a clear description of the broad process employed for the revision, review and approval of the mission. The process used to develop and approve the core themes, objects and indicators is not as clear. BSU describes the current core themes as a draft and the institution should report on revisions in the year 3 report.

Concern 1: The institution should document approval of core themes by its governing board, disseminate core themes broadly and evaluate and incorporate revisions as appropriate.

Standard One

The institution articulates its purpose in a mission statement, and identifies core themes that comprise essential elements of that mission. In an examination of its purpose, characteristics, and expectations, the institution defines the parameters for mission fulfillment. Guided by that definition, it identifies an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment.

Standard 1.A  Mission

Standard 1.A.1 The institution has a widely published mission statement—approved by its governing board—that articulates a purpose appropriate for an institution of higher learning, gives direction for its efforts, and derives from, and is generally understood by, its community.

Mission:

Boise State University is a public, metropolitan research university providing leadership in academics, research, and civic engagement. The University offers an array of undergraduate
degrees and experiences that foster student success, lifelong learning, community engagement, innovation, and creativity. Research, creative activity and graduate programs, including select doctoral degrees, advance new knowledge and benefit the community, the state and the nation. The University is an integral part of its metropolitan environment and is engaged in its economic vitality, policy issues, professional and continuing education programming, and cultural enrichment.

The currently approved mission statement for Boise State University is focused and provides a clear direction for the institution. The BSU mission recognizes the institution’s commitment to instruction at different academic levels, to the success of all students, and to provide service to Idaho’s diverse peoples and communities.

Standard 1.A.2. The institution defines mission fulfillment in the context of its purpose, characteristics, and expectations. Guided by that definition, it articulates institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment.

Boise State University defines mission fulfillment as follows:

From the set of Measures for each Core Theme we have identified a small number of Key Performance Measures (KPM) that serve the purpose of a dashboard-like indicators as to whether we, at the university level, are fulfilling our mission. KPM are chosen to focus on the fundamental aspects of our mission, for example, “Are students graduating?” Our choice of an acceptable level for each is based on a number of factors, including examination of similar measures at peer institutions, consideration of the strategic goals of the Idaho State Board of Education, and awareness of the contexts of our community and student body.

KPMs are considered as demonstrating mission fulfillment while indicators of success demonstrate the ability to accomplish the mission.

Given this definition, BSU has defined mission fulfillment; however, the implementation structure of measures and indicators of achievement is overly broad and may not provide the focus data needed to inform the KPMs.

Standard 1.B Core Themes

1.B.1 The institution identifies core themes that individually manifest essential elements of its mission and collectively encompass its mission.

1.B.2 The institution establishes objectives for each of its core themes and identifies meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement that form the basis for evaluating accomplishment of the objectives of its core themes.
Core Themes:

1. Undergraduate education
2. Graduate education
3. Research and creative activity
4. Community commitment

Boise State University’s four Core Themes address the essential elements of the mission collectively and overall commitment of the institution to the state. The Core Themes are clearly defined and, in particular, the narrative describing the KPMs provides valuable descriptions of mission fulfillment as defined in 1.A.2. However, some of the benchmarking in the narratives do not supply adequate rational (i.e., determining 6 year graduation rates of 30%).

BSU has employed a strategy of creating numerous indicators of achievement; the report states, “...we have been comprehensive in developing Indicators of Success and Measures, going well beyond the set of measures we have identified as KPMs.” The intent is to provide individual units the latitude to identify those indicators that are meaningful and assessable with the anticipation that units will revise and elaborate during implementation. However, at this point the measures are extremely numerous and almost exclusively quantitative without indication of quality. The current indicators would provide only general information that is not aligned with the KPMs and does not demonstrate the institutional goal of indicating the ability of the BSU to accomplish the mission.

The Indicators of success need to be reviewed and refined for the specificity and usefulness of the measures. Indicators should be focused on those that can provide meaningful information. Rationale for specific benchmarking should be included.

Recommendation

Recommendation: Boise State University should refine indicators of achievement to ensure that the indicators are meaningful, direct measures of the objectives. Std 1.B.2
Addendum

Review of Responses to Recommendations

NWCCU Recommendations from Comprehensive Review, October 2009

Recommendation 1: Core Curriculum Reform

Boise State University continues to be challenged by self-identified weaknesses in the current Core Curriculum. The Committee recommends that the Core Reform Task Force continue to foster deliberative processes that result in timely adoption of a general education framework that aligns curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment with articulated learning outcomes. (Standard 2.C.2, Policy 2.1)

Dramatic progress has been made since the 2009 review. The Core Reform Task Force has developed a comprehensive Core Curriculum with a new general education framework, the Foundational Studies Program, and in October 2010 Faculty Senate approved the Foundational Studies Program. University Learning Objectives have been developed around 3 themes with 11 outcomes. Co-curricular activities connect with the learning outcomes. A foundation studies director and staff have been hired. Faculty have been selected and course development is underway. An assessment plan is in place.

As full implementation of the program will occur in fall semester 2012, the University should report on progress in the year three report.

Recommendation 2: Assessment of Academic Programs

The Committee recognizes that the University has made significant progress in policies, instruments, and processes for assessment of educational effectiveness; but it recommends that the University ensure that all academic units are in compliance with University procedures and NWCCU standards on assessment, particularly the final step of demonstrating improvement of teaching and learning. (Standard 2.B.2 and 2.B.3, Policy 2.2)

Significant efforts have been made to implement assessment of all programs and courses. As noted in Recommendation 1 the new General Education design includes appropriate assessment to be implemented in tandem with the new program. Program-level assessment is conducted through Periodic Review of Academic Departments (PRAD) (for programs that do not have specialized accreditation) on a 5 year cycle.

Acknowledging the wide variation of practices at the course level the University has invested in assessment software that will provide structure and feedback to the faculty. The program was
piloted in summer 2011 and will be implemented in fall 2011. The University should report on progress in all areas of assessment in the year three report.

**Recommendation 3: Advising**

*The Committee recommends that the University develop and implement systematic campus-wide policies and procedures in order to provide high quality advising to all students and to prepare faculty and other personnel responsible for the advising function.* (Standard 2.C.5 and 3.D.10)

A comprehensive advising plan has been designed and implemented since the 2009 report. The University Advising Council, working from February to October 2010, developed the university advising plan and action items, referred to as the "University Advising Network." New processes, policies and practices are in place supported by increased staffing and advising tools. Advisor training and assessment of advising have been implemented.

**Recommendation 4: Grievance Policies**

*The Committee recommends that the University review and revise policies and procedures for students to follow in filing complaints or grievances against a staff or faculty member and that this information be widely and publicly shared.* (Standard 3.B.3)

The policies and procedures governing student complaints and grievances against faulty and staff and been reviewed and revised. One policy has been revised and new policies developed. The policies have been widely disseminated to students.

**Recommendation 5: Research Policies**

*The Committee recommends that faculty play a substantive role in establishing and updating policies relating to research, especially regarding intellectual property, conflict of interest, and research misconduct, so as to ensure that they are consistent with federal regulations and accepted practices in higher education.* (Standards 4.B.2 and 4.B.3)

Research policies addressing intellectual property, conflict of interest and research misconduct have been revised. However, the State Board of Education or internal administrative units and legal largely developed the policies. These draft policies have been submitted to faculty through the Boise State University Research Committee, the Faculty Senate, and the Boise State University Policy Committee for review in fall 2011. It will be important that the faculty have a role in refining and approving these policies. The University should report further on the progress of faculty review and approval of these policies in the year three report.

**Recommendation 6: Research Infrastructure**

Although Boise State University has made great strides in providing grant support for faculty engaged in research and graduate education, the Committee recommends that the institution provide additional support and infrastructure for faculty engaged in research, ensure that its research support infrastructure keeps pace with its growing research emphasis, and make certain that graduate student policies and procedures reflect this emphasis. Areas of concern
include the Indirect Cost Recovery policy, purchasing and HR regulations, faculty compensation, and post-award grant management. (Standards 2.D.1, 2.D.3, 4.A.4, and 4.B.4)

In addition to the policies revised under Recommendation 6, significant policies and structures have been addressed and revised to provide needed research infrastructure support. A revised Faculty Incentive Pay Program was approved and implemented in the fall of 2010. The indirect cost policy has been revised in ways that provide additional support for faculty members involved in research. Research-specific training at all levels has been implemented. Enhanced IT support for research, purchasing and HR is underway. In addition, Idaho State code was modified to enhance independence of BSU where appropriate and eliminate duplication of oversight. The successful impacts of these changes have been evidenced through increased distribution and investment of indirect and streamlined processes for procuring bids.

Recommendation 6 asks that BSU ensures graduate student policies and procedures reflect this growing research emphasis. The University Graduate Council, a standing committee of the Faculty Senate, is charged with the oversight of all policies that affect graduate students. At this time there are no specific policies or procedures indicated as under review. The Graduate Council will continue to monitor policies and initiative any required actions.

**Recommendation 7: Evaluation of Part-time Faculty**

The Committee recommends that Boise State University policies be revised and implemented to ensure that all BSU faculty, including part-time faculty, are evaluated in a regular and systematic manner. (Standard 4.A.5 and Policy 4.1)

Boise State acknowledges the importance of evaluating all faculty, including part-time faculty. However, at the time of the report they are waiting for the implementation of on-line course evaluations. (Recommendation 2 Assessment of Academic Programs.) The University has not met recommendation 7: Evaluation of Part-time Faculty, and the institution should report on progress towards implementation of part-time faculty reviews in the year three report.

**Recommendation 8: Limit on Maximum Indebtedness**

The Committee recommends that the University’s governing board amend its policy on the use of indebtedness to include a limit on the maximum amount of debt an institution can have. (Standard 7.A.4)

While the State Board of Education has not set a maximum debt limit for institutions in the Idaho state system, the board regularly monitors the debt burden ration and has communicated the ceiling at 8%. Boise State University has managed debt burden ratios with care and when the ratios reached 7.61% in 2010 (due to balloon payments) BSU choose to finance a housing project from internal reserves. The debt ratio for 2011 is 5.23%.
While the University has carefully monitored this ratio there should be continued effort with the State Board to set a policy on the use of indebtedness to include a limit on the maximum amount of debt an institution can have. BSU should report on progress in their comprehensive report. New standard 2.A.30