

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

University of Alaska Anchorage

Anchorage, Alaska

Year One Review Report

Fall, 2011

A Confidential Peer-Evaluation Report Prepared for the Northwest Commission of Colleges and
Universities

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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 the University of Alaska Anchorage. The committee reviewed the Comprehensive Evaluation Report prepared in October 2010, the Commission recommendations to the University of Alaska Anchorage, the University of Alaska Anchorage Year One Report, and the institutional catalog and the 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.

It was comprehensive in approach in addressing Standard One. The report also discussed responses to the NWCCU recommendations following the review conducted in October 2010. In addition, the report also addressed Eligibility Requirements 2 and 3.

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.

The University of Alaska System was established by the state constitution. It is governed by the University of Alaska Board of Regents. The University of Alaska System is composed of a system office, one separately accredited community college, and three separately accredited universities of which the University of Alaska Anchorage is one.

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 the University of Alaska Anchorage is focused and provides a clear direction for the institution. The mission is appropriate and focused on the educational interests of students. The current mission was approved by the Board of Regents in 2007. The mission is widely disseminated to the UAA campus and community. The set of core

themes for UAA are aligned with the five priorities of the UAA 2017 Strategic Plan and were approved by the Chancellor’s Cabinet in 2009.

Concern: The report is not clear with regard to whether the core themes have been reviewed and approved by the Board of Regents. The 2013 Year Three Report should specifically address this requirement.

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:

The mission of the University of Alaska Anchorage is to discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, engagement, and creative expression. Located in Anchorage and on community campuses in Southcentral Alaska, UAA is committed to serving the higher education needs of the state, its communities, and its diverse peoples. The University of Alaska Anchorage is an open access university with academic programs leading to occupational endorsements; undergraduate and graduate certificates; and associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degrees in a rich, diverse, and inclusive environment.

The currently approved mission statement for the University of Alaska Anchorage is focused and provides a clear direction for the institution. The UAA mission recognizes the institution’s commitment to instruction at different academic levels, to the success of all students, and to service to Alaska’s diverse peoples and communities. The current mission was approved by the Board of Regents in 2007. The mission is widely disseminated to the UAA campus and community.

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.

UAA defines mission fulfillment as follows.

Evaluating mission fulfillment requires a comprehensive view of the programs and services provided, as reflected in the core theme objectives, outcomes, and indicators. Based on a rating scale of strong, sufficient, or weak, a determination of mission fulfillment will depend on each objective being rated either strong or sufficient. Any areas of weakness will be accompanied by a plan for improvement.

Given this definition, UAA has clearly defined mission fulfillment and linked mission fulfillment to objective that are connected to the institution's core themes. Given the fact that UAA has tightly linked mission fulfillment to objectives, outcomes and indicators it is critically important for UAA's indicators to define specific targets. UAA could better refine the existing set of indicators, and this is discussed below.

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 Theme 1: Teaching and Learning

Core Theme 2: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity

Core Theme 3: Student Success

Core Theme 4: UAA Community

Core Theme 5: Public Square

UAA has a clearly defined mission statement and connected four Core Themes to the mission. Each core theme is specifically defined and described in detail in the Year One Report.

As noted in the Addendum to this report, UAA previously received a recommendation from the Commission to refine the indicators for each core theme. The UAA Year One Report acknowledges that "During the summer 2011 strategic assessment the core theme objectives and indicators were revisited. The Cabinet decided to maintain the current suite of indicators since indicator revision (including identifying thresholds of concern) will be a principal task of the new Cabinet Subcommittee."

This means at the time the Year One Report was submitted the indicators for each core theme had not been refined as recommended in the February 7, 2011 letter from the Northwest Commission. Given this, it is not clear that the current set of indicators are *"meaningful,*

assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement that form the basis for evaluating accomplishment of the objectives of its core themes.”

Recommendation

Recommendation: UAA 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 the Year Seven Report and Site Visit (Fall 2010)

Recommendation One. The committee recommends that the institution work quickly to refine the indicators for each core theme, ensure that measures are in place for each, reach agreement on targets for desirable improvements, and collect and analyze data relative to those targets (Standard 4.1.1, 4.B.1).

The UAA Year One Report (September 15, 2011), acknowledges that “During the summer 2011 strategic assessment the core theme objectives and indicators were revisited. The Cabinet decided to maintain the current suite of indicators since indicator revision (including identifying thresholds of concern) will be a principal task of the new Cabinet Subcommittee.”

This means at the time the Year One Report was submitted the indicators for each core theme had not been refined as recommended in the February 7, 2011 letter from the Northwest Commission. Given this, Recommendation One from the Commission has not been addressed. At a minimum, the Year Three Report to be submitted by UAA in 2013 should address the institution’s progress on Recommendation One. Indeed, this specific request is contained in the February 7, 2011 letter from the Commission.

Recommendation Two. Some artificial boundaries may have been created by classifying specific units and functions within a single or limited number of core themes. The committee recommends that the institution look holistically at the roles and contributions that units and departments make to multiple core themes and further that the report reflect this holistic view (Standards 3.B.2, 4.A.4).

The Year One Report maps UAA’s core themes against UAA colleges and divisions. This does help to clarify the role of various departments play relative to the institution’s core themes. UAA should use the Year Three Report as an opportunity to further address progress made relative to Recommendation Two.