

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A Comprehensive Evaluation Committee Report

**University of Montana Western
Dillon, MT**

April 21-23, 2010

A Confidential Report Prepared by the Evaluation Committee for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

Evaluation Committee Roster

Dr. Elizabeth M. Street, Committee Chair, Vice President for University Advancement, Central Washington University, Ellensburg, WA

Dr. Cole R. Dawson, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty, Warner-Pacific College, Portland, OR

Dr. Steven L. VanderStaay, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Director of Academic Assessment, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA

Dr. Ronald H. Dalla, Vice Provost for Graduate Education, Research, Academic Planning and Evaluation, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA

Dr. Kay C. Carnes, Associate Dean School of Business Administration, Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA

Dr. Kathleen A. Bemis, Dean, Division of Continuing Education, Linfield College, McMinnville, OR

Dr. Diane L. Brimmer, Vice President for Student Development, Viterbo University, La Crosse, WI

Dr. Hans E. Bynagle, Library Director, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA

Mr. Craig E. Morris, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Southern Oregon University, Ashland, OR

Dr. Ronald L. Baker, Staff Liaison, Executive Vice President, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, Redmond, WA

Table of Contents

Committee Roster	2
Table of Contents	3
Introduction.....	4
Quality of Self-Study and Supporting Materials.....	4
Methods Used to Verify the Self-Study.....	4
Institutional Compliance with Eligibility Requirements	5
Standard One.....	6
Standard Two	9
Standard Three	24
Standard Four	28
Standard Five	30
Standard Six.....	36
Standard Seven.....	40
Standard Eight	42
Standard Nine.....	44
Summary	45
Commendations and Recommendations.....	45
Appendix A: List of Interviewees	47

Introduction

A nine-member evaluation committee accompanied by a staff liaison from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (See Page 1 of this report for a complete list.) conducted an evaluation of the University of Montana Western in Dillon, Mont. on behalf of the commission. The committee submits this confidential report of its findings consistent with the requirements of a ten-year comprehensive review.

The self-study was submitted in a timely manner, and Dr. Brian Price, who oversaw the institution's preparation of the self-study and for the visit, was extraordinarily helpful at every turn. He provided a workroom consistent with the standards set down by the commission staff, provided exhibits in print copy in the workroom, scheduled interviews as requested by team members, and responded to requests for additional data during the visit.

Quality of Self-Study and Supporting Documents

All major constituents—faculty, administrators, staff, and students—contributed to the self-study, and the report was written by multiple authors. A member of the faculty wrote Standards 1, 6, and 9 while administrators with oversight of the content of Standards 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 were the primary writers for those sections. As noted in the preface of the self-study, the final version of the report was completed so close to the deadline for submission that it was not fully vetted by the university community before submission. To ensure that the report reflected the voice of the entire community, it was distributed to the campus at the same time it was mailed to the committee. Members of the campus community were invited to submit comments or corrections, which were summarized and made available to team members when they arrived on campus. Although there were a few suggested additions or corrections in these materials, they did not substantially alter the sense of the document, and campus conversations revealed that constituents thought it accurately told the institution's story. However, the evaluation committee did note a substantial number of mechanical errors in the document which might have been prevented with a more thorough and less hurried editing. The report was responsive to the standards, although it tended to be less analytic than the staff at the commission office recommend.

Supporting materials were placed on the web to allow team members to view them before arriving on campus. While that effort was greatly appreciated, a number of the links didn't work when team members attempted to access them. Still the same materials were available in print copy in the exhibit room, and requests for additional background material were addressed quickly and graciously.

Methods Used to Verify the Self-Study

Team members carefully reviewed all supporting materials, toured campus facilities, and conducted interviews with numerous administrators, faculty, staff, and students and with members of the Board of Regents and the Local Executive Board. A list of those who were interviewed is included in Appendix A.

Institutional Compliance with Eligibility Requirements

The University of Montana Western (hereafter sometimes referred to as simply “Montana Western”) is fully in compliance with the commission’s eligibility requirements. It is authorized to operate and award degrees by the Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education (hereafter BOR, Board of Regents, or regents) in which the constitution of Montana vests such power. Montana Western’s mission statement was developed by campus constituents and has been adopted by an appropriately constituted Board of Regents, which serves as the governing board for the institution. Montana Western operates both in policy and in practice with institutional integrity. The chief executive officer of Western, the chancellor, is appointed by the regents, and neither he nor any other executive officer of the institution is a member of the governing board. Well-defined administrative and support services are in place, and Montana Western hires a core of full-time, professionally qualified faculty who meet the standards set forth in the eligibility requirements.

Montana Western offers both associate and baccalaureate degrees that are based on recognized fields of study and that meet the standards set forth in the eligibility requirements. Students complete an adequately comprised general education core, and Montana Western provides library resources, technology, and services that are appropriate to the mission and to the scope of programs provided. Academic freedom is protected both by policy and in practice. The institution identifies outcomes for each of its degree programs although its programs of assessment are uneven across them.

Montana Western operates by state mandate as an open admission institution. A catalog, which is published annually and available in print and online, includes all elements required by the commission.

Although quite lean, the institution’s financial resources are adequate to its mission. Its records are audited annually, and the audit includes an unqualified opinion on the financial statement.

Montana Western maintains data necessary to determine institutional effectiveness, and these data are shared internally and with external audiences. The institution has been in existence for over a hundred years and is fully operational. It openly discloses information required by the commission to carry out the commission’s evaluation and accreditation functions and clearly understands its relationship with the accrediting body.

Standard One – Mission and Goals, Planning and Effectiveness

Standard 1.A – Mission and Goals

The University of Montana Western’s mission and goals were collaboratively developed and are well understood by the campus community. They were most recently updated during the transition to block scheduling –Experience One—which occurred in the decade just passed. The most recent version of the mission was adopted by the Board of Regents during the 2005-2006 academic year and is prominently featured in the institution’s catalog and in other publications. At the conclusion of each semester, a widely distributed report details progress on action items tied to the goals; at the same time, senior staff review and revise action items to ensure their currency with respect to the goals. The goals are consistent with the mission and with the institution’s resources.

Led by a faculty initiative, the institution undertook a remarkable transition of its delivery of educational programs in order to be more responsive to the aspect of its mission which requires “experiential learning that combines theory and practice.” Inspired and informed by the nationally acclaimed model at Colorado College, the faculty advocated the transition to what Montana Western now refers to as Experience One, the “one-class-at-a-time scheduling system which facilitates an emphasis on experiential learning of the authentic skills, knowledge, and orientation of professionals within and across the academic disciplines the faculty represent.” Recognizing that the transition would have far-reaching effects on all areas of the institution, Montana Western sought and received support from the non-academic side of the house to assist with the transition. It became clear, immediately in some areas and more slowly in others, that this transition would require an overhaul of operations, policies, and protocols in virtually every office, from the registrar to the bookstore and from admissions to library. Still they soldiered on and at the end of the day have achieved an outcome that no other public higher education institution in the country has achieved.

Public service is entirely consistent with Experience One, and Montana Western provides ample evidence that administrators, faculty, staff, and students are engaged in public service activities. Examples include service on boards of community agencies, welcoming members of the community to campus events, and “Rural Fridays.” The latter is a program of the Department of Education in existence for two decades in which students from K-8, 2-teacher schools in the area are bused to campus and receive instruction from Montana Western students who are preparing to be teachers.

The congruence between the mission and goals and the institution’s successful transition to block scheduling is remarkable. It is clear that Experience One drives virtually every aspect of the institution’s activities from staff hiring and selection of faculty to resource allocation, and planning.

The evidence suggests a close relationship between Montana Western and the commission office related to substantive change. Five times in the past decade, Montana Western has submitted substantive change proposals to the commission each of which has been approved as “no change” by the commission office.

Standard 1.B – Planning and Effectiveness

A strategic planning committee engages the entire university community in a thorough going strategic planning process that is iterative, that includes twice yearly evaluation of outcomes, and that is revised as needed to remain current with changing circumstances. The planning approach that Montana Western employs is so participatory that some members of the community reported frustration about the length of time it took to finalize the original document. Still, this level of participation and transparency seems to be part of the current fabric of the institution and may be one of the reasons for the astounding dedication the evaluation team witnessed to the plan and to Experience One.

The most recent strategic plan was developed as the institution was in transition to Experience One and spans the period from 2006-2012. The plan is built around five goals, each of which includes measurable objectives and action items. The five goals are:

1. Improve undergraduate education.
2. Increase enrollment through enhanced affordability, access, success and retention and increase graduation rates.
3. Employ, retain and support an excellent faculty and staff.
4. Enhance successful development, maintenance and improvement of the campus in support of long-range development plans.
5. Strategically position the university for maximum efficiency and long-range success.

The ambitious nature of the plan is evident in the objectives (5) and action items (42) for Goal 1. Following its completion and the first year of operation under its provisions, the institution recognized the wisdom of prioritizing the action items. Thus, subsequent iterations of the document assign two levels of priority—highest and secondary—to the action items.

Each semester, a faculty member—Dr. John Hajduk—coordinates a progress report on each of the action items, and the report is shared with the university community and posted to the university's website. This very robust and transparent process is commendable, and there is abundant evidence that the plan drives decision-making and resource allocation. Even so, there are a number of "highest" priority action items on which no progress is reported after four years. For that reason, the institution might be wise to sharpen its focus related to the action items given the constraints of funding and personnel.

There is abundant evidence that the institution is ever watchful of a number of dashboard-level performance indicators including enrollment and student retention rate. Further, the very positive trajectory they've been able to achieve in these indicators has strengthened their resolve to continue practices that are working and to improve programs, services, and activities.

Although Montana Western operates with very lean resources, the institution has found a way to achieve effective evaluation and planning. Montana Western has not invested in a stand-alone office of institutional research, but does have the advantage of a system-wide Banner database that enables individual administrators and staff to run and review reports of interest on key quantitative measures from its data warehouse. The chancellor, vice chancellor for administration and finance, and provost work with the strategic planning and budget committees to track progress on important indicators, and they do so with impressive results. The system-wide centrally located data warehouse makes data retrieval relatively easy and also

ensures that all members of the community see the same data. So, while the responsibilities for institutional research are somewhat diversified on the campus, the committee structures and the strong leadership team have evolved a system that results in relatively trouble free access to data and its routine review.

Commendation

The evaluation team commends the University of Montana Western for its design of Experience One and the entire campus community on the foresight, spirit, hard work, and tenacity associated with realizing the vision of experiential learning and adjusting operations, policies, and protocols to advance block scheduling. As the only public institutions in the nation to have achieved a successful implementation of this experiential system, Montana Western has remained true to its mission. Through a thoughtful program of marketing, the university has recruited students who are drawn to this approach to teaching and learning, increased its enrollment, and dramatically improved its freshman-to-sophomore retention rate. As a result of the national recognition of Experience One, the university has improved its reputation within the Montana Higher Education System.

Commendation

The evaluation team commends the University of Montana Western for the thoughtful and inclusive process it employed in developing a strategic plan and for the effective systems of communication and transparency that pervades all campus decisions. The plan is particularly noteworthy because it has directed activity and resource allocation, has been regularly revisited and revised consistent with changing conditions, includes not only goals and objectives but also action items for which progress is systematically reviewed, and is well understood by the university and larger community.

Commendation

The evaluation team commends the administration, faculty and staff of the University of Montana Western for creating a culture of caring, respect, and approachability where students feel supported in their personal growth and educational pursuits.

Standard Two – Educational Program and Its Effectiveness

Standard 2.A – General Requirements

The University of Montana Western is one of three four-year schools administratively connected to The University of Montana – Missoula. The University of Montana schools comprise one half of the Montana University System (MUS) The MUS negotiates for all of the state two- and four-year higher education institutions with the state governor and legislature regarding resources to maintain and deepen the quality of all institutions, including Montana Western. The Board of Regents of Higher Education (BOR) oversees the MUS. Routine attendance at BOR meetings by administrators from Montana Western facilitates consistent face-to-face discussion and negotiation. This consistency of presence and participation enables Montana Western to maintain a high profile that serves it well in budget and other critical negotiations.

Overall, Montana Western has sufficient human, physical, and financial resources to support its educational programs. Department operating budgets are generally low but allow the faculty to do the essential things. Departmental budgets were not reduced as part of the recent budget problems faced by Montana Western. For fiscal year 2010, the provost distributed \$30,000 to supplement department operating budgets, using 2010 funds from tuition and fees resulting from increased enrollment.

The educational programs are on a seven-year review cycle. During the review process, every aspect of each program, including its mission statement and program learning outcomes, is scrutinized, evaluated, and either reaffirmed or amended and updated. An external reviewer participates in the process. The results of the program review are sent to the provost, the chancellor, and ultimately to the BOR.

All of the degree programs have learning outcomes that clearly define the degree objectives and which are listed in the university catalog. Assessment of these learning outcomes and using the results of the assessment to improve teaching and learning is uneven at the university. The Department of Business and Technology, the Department of Education, and the Department of History, Philosophy, and Social Science have made progress in assessing learning outcomes and making changes in the program based on the results. Other departments need to be convinced of the value of assessing the program learning outcomes.

Montana Western does not offer any degree programs in a concentrated or abbreviated timeframe. However, the university does offer a number of credit-bearing weekend classes. The syllabi and faculty vitae for these classes are vetted by Montana Western faculty who look for evidence of the assessment of the learning objectives for the class. The majority of these weekend classes are tied to the Equine Studies in Natural Horsemanship program, and they are skills courses. The student has to demonstrate that he/she has mastered prescribed skills in order to obtain credit for the class.

The vast majority of the curriculum at Montana Western is organized through block scheduling, where faculty teach and students take one course at a time for three-and-a-half weeks, three hours per day, four to five days per week (depending on whether the course is worth three or four semester credits). Both faculty and students focus upon a single subject area at a time. This

system allows more in-class contact hours than the normal multi-class arrangement because contact hours are actually full hours, not fifty minute hours or 75 minute hour-and-a-half periods. Students in a regular semester system average approximately 40 contact hours per course per semester, while those at Montana Western average approximately 54 contact hours per course per semester.

The faculty at Montana Western does have a major role and responsibility in the design, approval, and implementation of the curriculum. Course additions and deletions, substantive changes in course content, and new program proposals are initiated by individual faculty who first seek approval at the departmental/unit level. The proposal then goes to the Curriculum Committee, a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate. Changes in the General Education Program are directed to the General Education Committee, another subcommittee of the Faculty Senate, for review before being forwarded to the Curriculum Committee for review. The Curriculum Committee forwards approved proposals to the Faculty Senate for review. The Faculty Senate sends approved proposals to the provost for his recommendation to the chancellor. At each step, the responsible body or person may accept or reject proposals or advise changes to the original proposal, whose initiator then must seek approval again from each of the responsible parties. Substantive curricular and program changes are not retroactive. Students' learning experiences are governed by the policies declared in the course catalog of the year of their admittance to the university.

Policies, regulations and procedures for adding and deleting courses or programs are reviewed through conversation among faculty at the departmental, Curriculum Committee and Faculty Senate levels as well as by direction from the provost. Proposed changes must be approved by the Faculty Senate which then sends a recommendation to the provost. If in agreement, the provost recommends the changes to the chancellor. Regular meetings of department chairs and curriculum schedulers enable information about changes to the curriculum or to policies and procedures to be communicated efficiently.

Montana Western's emphasis upon hands-on experiential learning (Experience One) through authentic disciplinary and professional practice enables students to integrate theory and practice. Because of Experience One's emphasis on having students experience the practices authentic to the academic disciplines and associated careers, research is fundamental to all students' learning experience. Consequently, research in the library is a normal part of nearly every Montana Western course. The three-hour long blocks allow faculty to take their classes to the library for library staff to introduce the students to the use of the library's resources. Because the library's physical holdings are relatively small, students learn to use a range of on-line resources.

About 85 percent of Montana Western courses are scheduled in three-hour blocks. Under Experience One, courses are scheduled to last from 8:15 AM to 11:15 AM or 12:15 PM to 3:15 PM for three-and-a-half weeks. Students take one block at a time and take 4 of these blocks per semester. Because of a lack of competition from other courses, faculty can plan field trips knowing that they are not taking students away from other conflicting academic responsibilities. Classes involving environmental field trips are scheduled in the first two and last blocks of the year. Many other classes offer field trips (to libraries for research, to innovative educational facilities, to museums and galleries, for example) throughout the school year.

Montana Western does also offer some courses in 50-minute periods once or twice a week throughout the entire semester. These classes are scheduled in the afternoon after 3:15 so that they do not conflict with the classes offered on the block schedule.

Most Montana Western courses are offered once per semester or once per year, making them reliably available to all students. However, most departments offer some courses on a two-year rotation. Such courses are clearly marked in the university catalog. Faculty and advisors work closely with students to help students plan and time their course selection appropriately. In this way, the Montana Western curriculum is planned for optimal learning and accessible scheduling.

The primary disadvantage with Experience One seems to be in the scheduling of classes. The faculty and administration must negotiate very carefully in order to reconcile both student and program needs. For example, biology classes that depend on field research must be scheduled either early in the fall semester or late in the spring semester, forcing other courses in the major into the middle blocks. Also, general education courses must be intentionally placed through the blocks so that students have the opportunity to meet these requirements in a timely fashion and appropriate sequence. Summer school provides an additional opportunity for students to repeat a general education course or to “catch up” or “get ahead” on their general education requirements.

No degree programs have been eliminated at Montana Western since 1987. The BS: Secondary Education Industrial Technology program and the Computerized Machine Tool Technology Certificate Program are moving to Helena, Montana, through a collaborative articulation agreement with the University of Montana’s Helena College of Technology. This move will enable Montana Western to maintain a program that has significant public support while taking advantage of a far larger demographic base, more physical space, and more contemporary machinery and equipment. There are seven students currently enrolled in the BS program. Five of these students are completing their Industrial Technology (IT) coursework this semester. Two students will take one IT course each this summer at Montana Western and each will have one remaining course that they will complete in Helena next fall semester.

Biology Department and Programs

The Department of Biology is in its first year as a department. Prior to this, biology faculty members were part of the Department of Environmental Sciences. The biology department offers the biology option of the Bachelor of Arts degree. Partially funded by a NIH grant, the department is moving its focus into cell/molecular biology. This degree prepares students for careers in the pharmaceutical industry, biotechnology, wildlife biology, and ecology, and for work in research labs.

The faculty members in the biology department are very supportive of the Experience One block schedule. The three-hour-a-day blocks are ideal for lab sciences, which allow the intermingling of exposure to a topic followed by laboratory experiences around that topic. When asked, the department chair indicated that all biology faculty members are enthusiastic about the block scheduling. There have been challenges with scheduling conflicts among the science, mathematics, physics, and chemistry courses that the department has had to deal with.

As mentioned above, the educational programs are on a seven-year review cycle. During the review process, every aspect of each program, including its mission statement and program learning outcomes, is scrutinized, evaluated, and either reaffirmed or amended and updated. Learning outcomes assessment is not part of this program review cycle. The biology programs are scheduled to undergo review beginning in 2010-2011.

No evidence was provided in the Comprehensive Self-Study Report, the exhibits, or by department members that learning outcomes assessment is being done on a regular basis or that the results of the assessment are used to improve student learning.

Environmental Sciences Department and Programs

The Department of Environmental Sciences offers the Bachelor of Arts degree with two options; the environmental interpretation option and the environmental sciences option. Environmental science is a growing area, and this department is experiencing a lot of student interest.

The environmental interpretation option is intended to provide students with an understanding of natural processes and the skills to communicate their understanding of these processes to a lay audience. Students with this degree are prepared to pursue careers as naturalists, environmental interpreters, outdoor educators and conservation enforcement officers.

The environmental sciences option is intended to provide students with an in-depth understanding of the natural processes that create and shape the environment, as well as knowledge of the human impact on the environment. Students with this degree pursue careers in the area of natural resources study and management. This degree also requires a minor area and the minor area that has the largest enrollment is geology.

The chair of the environmental sciences department indicated that the faculty members in this department are also very supportive of the Experience One block schedule. The three-hour-a-day blocks are ideal for field trips that the students in these two programs experience. They can go on the field trips without conflicting with other classes since the students take one course per block.

The environmental science department programs are scheduled for the seven-year review beginning in 2010-2011. No evidence was provided in the Comprehensive Self-Study Report, the exhibits, or by department members that learning outcomes assessment is being done on a regular basis or that the results of the assessment are used to improve student learning.

Equipment and repairs for the sciences and all other departments are funded as follows: All students are charged an equipment fee which can be used both for new equipment and for repairs to current equipment. Departmental budgets do not contain equipment and repair funds. Rather, these funds reside with the provost and the Equipment Fee Committee who respond to faculty requests and departmental needs after evaluating and prioritizing them from the overall perspective of the academic side of the university.

Industrial Technology Program

The Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education Industrial Technology and the Computerized Machine Tool Technology Certificate Program are both moving to Helena, Montana, through a collaborative articulation agreement with the University of Montana's Helena College of Technology. This move will enable Montana Western to maintain a program that has significant public support while taking advantage of a far larger demographic base, more physical space, and more contemporary machinery and equipment. There are seven students currently enrolled in the BS program. Five of these students are completing their industrial technology (IT) coursework this semester. Two students will take one IT course each this summer at Montana Western, and each will have one remaining course that they will complete in Helena next fall semester. No evidence was provided in the Comprehensive Self-Study Report, the exhibits, or by department members that learning outcomes assessment is being done on a regular basis or that the results of the assessment are used to improve student learning.

Mathematics Department and Programs

The Department of Mathematics offers a Bachelor of Arts with an option in mathematics and the Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education with a major in mathematics. Students pursuing the Bachelor of Arts degree with an option in mathematics are extremely well prepared to compete with peers for careers in either pure or applied mathematics. This degree is ideal for student pursuing careers in biological or ecological modeling, mathematical physics, cryptography, or probabilistic modeling. Students who earn the Bachelor of Science degree with a mathematics major are prepared to teach mathematics in grades 7 through high school.

The chair of the mathematics department and the other faculty members of this department are quite enthusiastic about block scheduling. The three-hour blocks are very useful for presenting a new idea, providing the students with an opportunity to work with the idea, and bring this part to conclusion while all is still fresh in the students' minds. Attendance becomes critical as missing a day of class is equivalent to missing a week of class during on a regular semester schedule.

Due to staffing issues in the department, some of the mathematics courses required in the majors are offered in alternate years. This gives added importance to the advising of the majors so that the student gets classes when they are offered.

Some of the staffing problem is due to the number of sections of developmental mathematics (M095) that are needed. As the BOR raised ACT and SAT admission scores, the administration calculated that up to 70 percent of each new first-year class will require developmental mathematics. As 30 percent fail this class the first time, in addition to offering a significant number of sections of M095 for students who need it, the department must also offer an additional number of sections to enable students to attempt it a second time. The department needs to refocus on developmental mathematics to insure student success in this course.

The mathematics department programs underwent the seven-year review beginning in 2006. As indicated on page 18 of the Comprehensive Self-Study, the department did not perform any significant learning outcomes assessment as part of this review. No evidence was provided in the Comprehensive Self-Study Report, the exhibits, or by department members that learning

outcomes assessment is being done on a regular basis or that the results of the assessment are used to improve student learning.

Natural Science Option Area

Montana Western offers a Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree program. This program is designed to allow graduates with an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) two-year degree to earn a bachelor's degree with minimal loss of time spent and credits earned in obtaining the AAS degree. The AAS degree requires 67 semester credits to complete. The BAS degree program requires an additional 60 semester credits which consist of 31-32 general education credits, 0-9 elective credits, and 20-28 option credits. Natural science is one of the possible option areas. The 20-28 credits in the natural science option are selected by the student in consultation with an advisor from courses in biology, chemistry, geology and physics.

All of the courses in the natural science option are offered by either the Department of Biology or the environmental sciences department. Neither of these departments offered any evidence that learning outcomes assessment was being done on a regular basis for this program.

Business and Technology

The Department of Business and Technology offers 2-year AAS and AS in business degrees and a 4-year BS in business. Demand for the 4-year degree has grown in recent years from 130 students in 2005 to 192 in the current year. In early 2009 the department received professional accreditation from the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE).

The mission of the business department is consistent with, and supports, the mission of the university to incorporate technology, problem-based learning, and hands-on and team based projects to aid students in acquiring those skills needed for success in the business world. Internships are a part of curricular requirements, giving students hands-on experience in real-world settings. In addition, several classes assign students to develop proposals for solving current problems provided by the university and local businesses.

Faculty members in the business department represent appropriate disciplines and are well qualified for the courses they teach. A concern of the evaluator is the excessive faculty load caused by understaffing. As the department has grown, faculty count has not kept up. Exacerbated by the block schedule where four credit offerings do not lend themselves easily to the number of courses needed for a business degree, most faculty in the department teach overloads to ensure adequate course offerings. While faculty members are at this time maintaining currency in professional development, the potential of burnout must be taken seriously.

The business department exhibits a highly developed assessment plan with direct learning measures based upon well thought out rubrics, standardized national examinations, and regular evaluations by internship supervisors, employers, and a business advisory board. The evaluator viewed numerous examples of assessment measures and ongoing changes to course content, delivery, and sequencing made as a result of these learning assessments. In 2009 the business faculty reorganized learning outcomes from 14 to seven and revised assessment rubrics accordingly.

The faculty of the Business and Technology Department are to be commended for their continued attention to meeting student learning outcomes and their speed in making changes based upon assessment findings.

Equine Studies

The equine studies program was approved to offer an A.A.S. in Equine Studies in 2002. In 2004, an A.A.S. in Natural Horsemanship was approved, and the following year the program was expanded to include a B.S. in Natural Horsemanship with options available in science, management and psychology. The program has grown from seven the first year to a total of 78 students in all degree areas with another 33 students enrolled in equine-related areas in other degree programs. Current students come from 28 states and four foreign countries.

The natural horsemanship degree is currently the only two- or four- year degree in this subject offered in the United States. Affiliation with a private business partner allows students to utilize instructors and facilities at the nearby 88,000 acre LaCense Montana Ranch. Graduates of the first classes have been highly sought after by trainers, as instructors at academies, and in other positions at equine facilities. Some are pursuing acceptance at veterinary medical schools.

Currently, equine studies is administratively housed within the existing Department of Business and Technology but a proposal has been filed to establish equine studies as an independent and interdisciplinary department. Faculty members in equine studies possess appropriate educational and practical credentials; two are licensed doctors of veterinary medicine. Numbers are sufficient for the current size of the program.

Assessment of learning takes place continually in both classroom settings and practical skills development. Goals have been set for each course, building in complexity as students increase in ability. Changes have been made regularly in course content and organization as a result of these assessments.

Bachelor of Arts: Social Science Option

At Montana Western, the Bachelor of Arts: Social Science option resides in the Department of History, Philosophy and Social Science (HPSS), which embraces history, philosophy, geography, psychology, political science, anthropology, and sociology in a purposefully integrative manner. Aligned with the university mission statement's emphasis upon "interdisciplinary education through experiential learning," the departmental mission statement describes the "multidisciplinary foundation" HPSS students receive. Focused "graduate outcomes" describe the skills, knowledge, and problem-solving abilities graduates will be able to demonstrate. HPSS boasts a remarkably high placement rate for its majors who apply to graduate school. Enrollment in most HPSS programs and options appears consistent and sustainable. Demand typically exceeds supply for the department's general education courses, which are often fully enrolled. The department struggles to cover all its social sciences offerings with available faculty, particularly in psychology. The department is currently discussing whether a major option in psychology can be sustained by one faculty line.

Assessment of the social science option occurs at many levels, including the course, the midpoint of student progress in the major, the senior seminar, and one year after graduating. HPSS faculty collect samples of senior level research writing as part of their outcome assessment plan; to heighten inter-rater reliability, 2-3 faculty members collaborate in the assessment of each graduating senior. Graduates of the program are surveyed, and faculty members select one course each year to assess and discuss its assessment with peers. Useful assessment resources and templates support faculty in these efforts while building consistency across the department. The summary course assessment template, for instance, concludes by asking faculty to summarize the "Action to be Taken as Result of Assessment," fostering evidence-based course improvement efforts. Assessment procedures are on-going and continuous within HPSS in that they occur annually, rather than on the institution's more typical 7-year cycle.

Education and Related Programs

The Department of Education offers a broad range of major, certificate, and endorsement programs in K-12 education on the Montana Western campus. Additional certificates and endorsement programs are offered on-line and/or through continuing education. The program has a social constructivist theoretical framework aligned with the university mission; faculty view themselves as mentors who guide future leaders. The department has a cohesive and comprehensive learning outcomes assessment system, refined through several iterations and supported by LiveText, an on-line e-portfolio and document system that facilitates rapid aggregation of assessment data. Student progress through the program is assessed by multiple direct and indirect measures, including observations, exams, and three Teacher Education Program (TEP) portfolios, documenting student achievement of student learning outcomes specified for three separate phases of the program. Faculty expressed confidence in the department's assessment system, noting that assessment practices had become successfully integrated into departmental practices.

The department's assessment procedures have drawn attention to specific areas in need of program improvement, such as teacher-candidate professionalism (dress, timeliness, etc.), permitting continuous program improvement.

Bachelor of Science degrees in the Department of Education have fallen by nearly 50 percent over the period 1999-2009. Total majors have fallen from 600 in 2000-2001 to 431 in 2009-2010. The department appears to have been proactive in response to these changes. The new early childhood education program, for instance, has made up 66 of the lost majors. And the department has pursued grants and other initiatives to improve recruitment. More important, the department is proposing education-related majors, including a free-standing health and recreation major, unconnected to teacher certification, which may also draw more students to the department's programs. In addition to discussions of growth, the department is appropriately discussing programs which no longer yield a sustainable graduating class.

English

The Department of English serves a broad range of students and programs with a small cadre of faculty. The department serves general education students, developmental writers, literature and creative writing majors, and elementary and secondary education students. The department has taken recent steps to assess and improve its service to many of these

constituents. An evidence-based assessment of developmental writers has led to recommendations for new linked classes that have provided a model for the general education program as a whole. Scheduling changes that ensure that all faculty teach English 102 have had similarly positive results, making course loads more even while drawing more students into the English major.

Policy A-6 Contractual Relationships with Organizations Not Regionally Accredited

The University of Montana Western does not offer courses or programs under contract with any organization not regionally accredited. There are two programs offered through the School of Outreach at Montana Western that are of interest to mention here however.

A number of credit-bearing, self-support courses are sponsored by Montana Western in cooperation with Virtual Education Software, Incorporated (VESI) as outreach to practicing K-12 teachers. The Montana Western Department of Education faculty review and approve the syllabi and instructors for the courses. The students enroll through Montana Western and then purchase the software for the course or purchase on-line access to the course from VESI. These are semester-long courses. VESI requires evaluation of the faculty, and these evaluations are provided to Montana Western.

A second program of interest is the Rosetta Stone Language Program. This consists of four-credit, on-line, self-support courses. There is no instructor for the class, and the classes are self-paced. The objectives and the necessary modules for a semester long course are supplied by Rosetta. Montana Western purchased a license which allows up to 25 students per semester to study any of 22 languages. These classes are offered using a number for an experimental course. This then leaves the decision as to whether the course will count as transfer credit to another institution up to the receiving institution.

Montana Western has an affiliation with a private business partner, the LaCense Montana Ranch, for the Equine Studies Natural Horsemanship program. This partnership is maintained by a contractual Memorandum of Understanding with a fixed chain of command, limitations and requirements.

Standard 2.B Educational Program Planning and Assessment Policy 2.2

The heart of Standard 2.B and Policy 2.2 beats with the rhythms of the institution's cycle of planning, assessing, modifying and re-assessing, all with the goal of continuously improving the educational programs of the university. Accordingly, the self-study report devotes fifteen pages to detailing the ways in which academic programs at the University of Montana Western fulfill the expectations of this standard and policy.

The catalog of the university clearly identifies the mission statements and learning outcomes for all programs and majors. In addition, the catalog indicates the means by which each major is to be assessed and directs the reader to the university web site for information about the results of the assessment process. An effort to access each of these items, however, resulted in spotty response. It appears that not all of the departments have provided the referenced data.

Generally, the mission statements are well crafted, reflecting both competencies expected within the academic community as well as vocational possibilities post graduation. Learning outcomes are clear, imply measurable goals, and are tied to the elements of the program mission statements.

A key to understanding the success of each of these degree programs rests, of course, with the assessment of student acquisition of the desired outcomes. The university acknowledges that it is in the midst of a program evaluation transition that has produced uneven results. Montana Western previously used a system of program evaluation that ran on a seven-year cycle. While this model yielded some interesting information, it did not consistently produce assessments of student learning outcomes or indications of how decisions for change were tied to data collected. In the past three years, several developments have improved the assessment environment at Montana Western.

First, the provost and a new assistant provost have attempted to move the academic programs to an annual assessment system, while simplifying the process and deepening the understanding of assessment as a necessary function of continuous improvement of the institution. While clearly an improvement, the new protocol does not explicitly tie program development to the university's mission or to its strategic plan.

Second, three departments have responded aggressively to the new assessment paradigm. The Departments of Education and of Business and Technology are well acquainted with program assessment based on learning outcomes as a result of gaining specialized accreditation by national organizations (NCATE and IACBE respectively). These departments have produced assessment plans and reports based on data derived from a variety of instruments, rubrics, and surveys. Business and Technology, for example, discovered deficiencies in quantitative elements of student learning. To address these shortcomings, they revised the curriculum to embed quantitative components across several courses instead of dealing with them only in discrete courses. Follow-up evaluation of student learning indicates positive results. In the case of education, when data indicated a potential discrepancy between portfolio and observational evaluations, the department instituted additional training sessions for evaluators. The department continues to strategize and conduct follow-up assessment related to data indicating stronger performance in professional "dispositions" among elementary educators than among secondary educators, weaknesses in articulation of an educational philosophy, and in general categories of professionalism.

Similarly, the Department of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences has embraced annual assessment. Through exit and alumni surveys, portfolio evaluations, and rubrics that address the department's learning outcomes, the faculty is increasingly aware of the qualities of their students. Evaluating student performance in critical thinking and in written and oral communication both at career mid-point and near graduation provides the department with an abundance of data on programmatic effectiveness. They have used these data to revise the curriculum, for example, in the creation of a common methodology course for all students majoring within the department and by differentiating quantitative and qualitative analytical skills needed by different majors. The department has been less successful in securing additional faculty lines, especially in psychology, even though they service a large percentage of general education courses.

Another key source of data for these departments has been the use of external consultants. These consultants read preliminary drafts of program reviews, visited campus, interviewed individual faculty and students, observed classes, and issued reports with specific recommendations. For the Departments of Education and the Business and Technology, requirements established by their specialized external accreditation (e.g. NCATE, IACBE) served this function. The History, Philosophy and Social Sciences department used a consultant from a regionally respected university.

Finally, requirements for assessment data are beginning to show up in key documents of the institution. For example, a "Curriculum Proposal Form" stipulates that applicants must "provide assessment information supporting the request." It is not clear if this information results from a consideration of learning outcomes, but it is a positive step.

The transition from the former to the current model of assessment, however, has yielded uneven results to this point. Outcomes assessment is not well understood through all academic departments. Proposed changes to the curriculum in these departments seem to result from anecdotal evidence and personal preference.

Confounding variables that impinge upon efforts to assess learning outcomes for some departments emanate from the necessity for course number and content revision mandated by the state Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE). This initiative is designed to provide clear transferability within the public higher education institutions in the state. Moreover, this task has been somewhat complicated by the move of Montana Western to the Experience One block scheduling of courses. Course titles, descriptions and credit hours must be reconciled with the OCHE system. These tasks are time-consuming and distract from focusing on outcomes assessment.

To encourage the development of a comprehensive understanding and commitment to annual assessment as an institutional priority, the university plans to hold a faculty workshop at the end of the spring semester. The goal of the workshop is for all departments to submit plans that tie learning outcomes, assessment processes, strategic planning and budgeting together.

It is clear that the transition to Experience One has created excitement among most academic departments. In mathematics, for example, the advantages gained by intense application of the principles of the discipline to problem solving have given students greater confidence. Comparisons of student learning in a traditional fifteen-week semester and those in a four week block demonstrate no significant differences. On the other hand, students entering the university unprepared for college level math pose a challenge to the block system. Approximately seventy percent of entering freshman will ultimately enroll in M 095, the developmental math course. Of these, approximately thirty percent will fail that course at least once. These realities place a heavy burden on the department to staff these courses and to manage within the confines of the block system. The department has been exploring different solutions, such as the "stringer" concept, to address this pressing need.

The Honors Program at Montana Western is also advantaged by the Experience One scheduling. Honors enrollment is based on a student self-identification process. The program selection committee (made up of faculty and students) does take grade point average and other indicators of academic ability into consideration. However, the committee also notes the level of

applicant curiosity, activities outside the classroom, and potential contributions to the seminar style learning in the program when making its decisions. Faculty interested in creating an honors course may submit proposals from which the committee identifies those that best fit the block schedule demands and are most likely to attract student enrollment. Normally, faculty teaching in the program do so on an overload compensation contract, though some have been able to include their courses as part of a fulltime load. Funding for the program, therefore, is somewhat inhibited by the overload budget. Currently, the program supports four honors courses per year. The program takes pride in its innovative, even experimental, approaches to team-teaching, experiential learning opportunities, interdisciplinary focus, and unique subject concentrations. Honors courses are typically reading and writing intensive. Travel courses are also part of the Honors Program, offering contextualize learning in Ireland, Spain, the Galapagos Islands, Eastern Europe, and Italy. Enrollment in honors courses is usually limited to fifteen students.

The English department faces the daunting reality that approximately forty percent of entering freshmen are deficient in writing skills. Strict application of Experience One scheduling means that needy students would have only four weeks, at most, of ENG 091 instruction. In response to this inadequacy, the department developed a “stringer” option to meet an additional one time a week with the instructor for the entire semester. The failure and drop-out rates for this initiative were exceptionally high, and there seemed to be no correlation between pass/fail rates in the stringer and ultimate pass/fail rates in the target competency course, ENG 102. Searching for better strategies, the department modified the stringer option and also developed a “stretch” option that integrated ENG 091 with ENG 102, increasing instructional time to seven weeks over two blocks. In order to assess these options, faculty from outside the department applied the Montana Writing Assessment rubric to the reading of student essays. Results demonstrated increased proficiency, declining fail rates, and student satisfaction for both. The stretch option did correlate with better ENG 102 pass rates, and therefore is the department’s preferred method of supporting students who enter the university deficient in writing skill.

All academic departments also benefit from university-wide assessment data such as the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Student Satisfaction Inventory. These instruments demonstrate, for example, that students surveyed at Montana Western are more active learners, engage in more deep learning experiences, reach higher levels of analytical thinking, and experience greater levels of meaningful relationships with faculty and fellow students than at institutions designated for comparison. On the other hand, students at the university are less likely to be engaged in enriching educational activities such as co-curricular programs, service learning, and internships than those at other institutions. On balance, the positives highlighted by these instruments can be taken as complimentary as well as complementary data in the assessment of academic programs. Correlation of learning outcomes within majors and general education, where appropriate, with measures of student “engagement” and “satisfaction” can provide another lens through which to view the total educational experience of students.

Standard 2.C – Undergraduate Program: General Education

Policy 2.1: General Education/Related Instruction Requirements.

Montana Western requires of all its degree and pre-baccalaureate programs a general education course of study described in the catalog (2.C.1; Policy 2.1). The general education program is described with a rationale that emphasizes the program’s “intent” and its “purpose” rather than

its outcomes. The rationale cites a fivefold purpose, and an orientation compatible with the emphasis in the university mission upon experiential learning, the integrity of the individual, and membership in an increasingly diverse and global society. The program is currently a distribution model of 31-32 credits, comprising coursework in written and oral communication, mathematics, behavioral and social sciences, humanities: expressive arts, humanities: literary and artistic studies, and the natural sciences.

Students and faculty interviewed by the evaluation team spoke favorably of curricular pilots introduced to improve the general education program, such as the linking of two fall blocks for incoming freshmen. This innovation, which creates a cohort of freshman that takes two successive blocks together, improved fall-spring retention and was favorably reviewed by students and faculty. While introduced to provide support and continuity for basic writers, these “stretched” blocks appear to ease the transition from high school to college by assisting students in becoming academically and socially integrated into campus life. Based on its successful fall pilot of such courses, the General Education Committee plans to increase the number of linked blocks for fall, 2010. The rapid development of the linked block or “stretch” idea demonstrates that the institution remains attentive to student success and eager to make program improvements during the transition to Experience One. Moreover, the application of the stretch course concept, which arose in English, to the larger campus demonstrates a facility for sharing assessment results and curricular innovations across programs.

However, students and faculty also described uncertainty and disagreement over the alignment of general education course offerings with the program’s published philosophy and purpose, its programmatic fit within the framework of Experience One, and responsibility for its assessment. Students frequently proved unable to describe the purpose and value of general education. Faculty in select programs described dissatisfaction with the program’s success in preparing students for “university-level thinking” and communication. Many described long debates over the program’s future. Faculty noted that they had identified a lack of alignment between the program’s curriculum and its philosophy but had not yet reached consensus on how program goals and purposes should be fulfilled, or the criteria by which courses are deemed relevant to the program (2.C.2). Faculty on the General Education Committee expressed support for the program goal to foster “engaged participation in a global society,” for instance, but noted that they had not yet determined how to structure the curriculum to achieve that goal.

Disagreement was also expressed regarding the relation of general education to major and minor options and programs, and the vertical development of general education competencies. For example, while many departments use writing-intensive methods, no upper-level general education requirement appears to exist to ensure that students in every program have curricular opportunities to develop the writing skills introduced in the freshmen year. There also do not appear to be processes for ensuring that all general education courses fulfill the catalog goal of developing student “communication skills.”

More significantly, the institution does not appear to have established an assessment program for general education as a program. The “Simplified Learning Outcomes Assessment System” establishes procedures for departmental programs; the self-study’s account of Standard 2.B (Educational Program Planning and Assessment) is also departmental in orientation and makes no mention of general education. Student learning outcomes are not published for the general education program. While the General Education Committee is currently considering

improvements to the program, they appear to do so without the benefit of evidence-based data provided by a well-structured outcome assessment system.

The committee finds that current debate and disagreement over general education to be healthy and appropriate, given the recent adoption of Experience One. In this initial stage of adoption, faculty have had to focus on the structure and teaching of block courses, and their fit within majors and minors. However, continued development of the program requires the development of a general education program that demonstrates a coherent design, receives broad faculty support, and is based on a clearly articulated rationale linked to expected learning outcomes that are regularly and systematically assessed.

Standard 2.G- Continuing Education and Special Learning Activities

Standard 2.H – Non-Credit Programs and Courses

Policy 2.6 – Distance Delivery of Courses, Certificate, and Degree Programs

The university's School of Outreach oversees a diverse group of credit programs and courses; Continuing Education Unit (CEU) offerings; and noncredit programs and courses. Some courses are face-to-face on campus and at nine off-campus locations. Many of these courses have a WebCT component. Some courses are entirely online and asynchronous on WebCT.

Outreach works with a small staff and limited budget but accomplishes its responsibilities in an efficient, cost-effective manner. Its interactions with academic departments, student support services, and other administrative offices are frequent, very collegial, and mutually beneficial. This cooperation helps maximize the limited resources of the School and University.

The evaluator finds evidence that the School of Outreach's credit, noncredit and distance offerings are congruent with the university's mission and have been approved through its establish mechanisms.

Full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty oversee and approve the planning of all credit-bearing School of Outreach courses and programs to assure rigor of program, quality of instruction, and currency of the material. The university's policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the utilization of revenue derived from the creation and production online courses.

The university and the School of Outreach have clearly articulated policies and procedures for admission, residency, and the transfer and granting of credit. Fees and refund policies in the School of Outreach are equitable. Credits and CEUs are granted on an appropriate level of student involvement. Student complaints are resolved through the dean of students' office. Students are informed about the required technological skills and equipment needed and support is provided for those who need training or assistance.

The evaluator finds that School of Outreach students have access to library and other learning resources as well as student services including advising, financial aid, tutoring, and career counseling. Outreach students are included in the Noel Levitz and NESSI surveys. Although there is evidence that several departments, particularly those most involved in distance education, engage in thorough going outcomes assessment, others do not. Further, the institution did not

provide evidence of a systematic method of measuring and reporting the comparability of distance and online courses with on-campus courses and programs (Policy 2.6 w)

The university uses WebCT as its course delivery system which the evaluator finds is appropriate to the on-campus and School of Outreach programs and allows for timely interactions between students and faculty and among students. Faculty members participate in either one-on-one training or an in-house produced course before teaching with WebCT. The School of Outreach and the university provide WebCT technical support for faculty and students. The evaluator found evidence that all non-credit courses, including CEUs, meet the requirements of 2.H.

Standard Three – Students

Standard 3.A – Purpose and Organization

University of Montana Western student affairs and student services professionals explain that they help realize the university's mission in a number of ways including: assisting Montana citizens with an open and accessible educational program; readying students for success in the classroom; providing leadership development and personal strength building opportunities; and offering applied learning experiences through service, sport, and internship experiences. All student development professionals are eager to serve students. The dean of students says, "As a whole, we don't have personal agendas. The focus is on the student. We all ask: 'What can we do to help this student be successful?'" This director of student success also remarks: "This is an amazing community. If someone is in trouble, people rally to help. Working here allows me to be a part of that."

Across the Montana Western campus – student affairs and student services included – resources are limited. Career services and the learning center each employ 0.5 FTE professional staff. Counseling services is a 1.0 FTE operation. While staffs are small, connections are good and the dean of students calls the student development professionals with whom she works "the best in the state." She believes that the vice chancellor for administration, finance, and student affairs, who also serves as the institution's chief student affairs officer, represents students and student concerns well and that communications between mid-level managers have been enhanced through daily meetings and regular meetings of University Council and Senior Staff.

Student affairs and student services operations including employees are well-trained, capable, creative, and experienced individuals dedicated to and instrumental in Montana Western student achievement. Each of the student affairs and student services operations shows evidence of practices designed to enhance student development. Those responsible for carrying out responsibilities related to the strategic plan follow up accordingly. Job titles and job descriptions clearly define duties and responsibilities. Performance appraisals and goal setting occur annually according to university procedure.

Standard 3.B – General Responsibilities

Montana Western professionals collect and review data to identify and address concerns and trends. For additional input, the Dean of Students has surveyed commuting students and students living on campus each December since 2002. The data have resulted in a trend line and quick check for satisfaction with academic advising, business services, bookstore, campus activities, career services, counseling services, dining services, financial aid, the health center, the physical environment, registrar and student conduct. The survey results show that well over 90 percent of the student respondents are satisfied with most services. In conversation, students and student association members were also overwhelmingly positive about classes and services at the University of Montana Western. Policies, procedures, and student rights and responsibilities are found online and in printed copies of the course catalog and student handbook.

The Associated Students of the University of Montana Western (ASUMW) meet weekly and post minutes on the group's website. Meeting minutes regularly include information on student concerns, plans for activities, and reports from those attending university committee meetings. From the minutes alone, one can see evidence of an active student senate that works to represent and address student concerns. To inform the administration of student concerns and views, the student governance association (ASUMW) president meets regularly with the dean of students and is a member of the university's budget committee. In addition, ASUMW is represented on university committees addressing issues related to athletes, the university's Birch Creek center, budget, curriculum, general education requirements, honors, state initiatives, strategic plan, and technology, among others. Intramural sport programs and many campus activities are coordinated by ASUMW interns.

Campus safety and security is a shared responsibility of facilities services and the dean of students. Campus security is provided in evening hours by Securitas. Dillon City Police assist Montana Western officials and Securitas as needed. Emergency manuals and emergency preparedness checklists are updated annually by the dean of students. Montana Western also offers safety education programs, Safe Ride, and safe walk services.

Standard 3.C – Academic Credit and Records

The admission and financial aid policies at the University of Montana Western are consistent with the College mission. With 70 percent of students eligible for Pell Grants, Montana Western is clearly able to assist in making a university education affordable to students. The university provides information on financial aid opportunities in its course catalog.

The *2009-2010 Catalog* and other publications are accurate, attractive, clear, readable, and understandable. These documents meet requirements of institutional mission, entrance and transfer credit requirements, course programs and sequences, full-time faculty, tuition, fee and program costs, available financial aid and procedures, refunds, licensure requirements, and understandable explanations of criteria for evaluation, degree and non-degree credit. The handbook provides clear statements and procedures related to academic and non-academic misconduct, services, clubs, and athletics. The institution protects the privacy of records and utilizes a fire proof file to ensure the safety and security of records.

Standard 3.D – Student Services

Academic support professionals work to provide a supportive learning environment. Montana Western offers a Ready to Rock advising and registration program for incoming students during the summer months. Another orientation experience occurs the Friday prior to the start of fall classes. Career services, disability services, learning assistance, tutoring, service learning, and a federally-funded student support services program are all available to Montana Western students.

Regarding advisement, a catalog description of academic advising states: "To help ensure that students are making satisfactory progress toward meeting the academic requirements of their area of study, all students should meet regularly with their faculty advisor. All students at Western are assigned a faculty advisor in their area of study once a major or program of study is declared. Undeclared majors are randomly assigned to faculty advisors until a major is

declared.” The university supports an advising center in addition to faculty advisors. “The advising center assists students who wish to discuss their program of study or who need to be assigned an academic advisor.” The academic advisors also provide each freshman student with an advising manual made up of forms, requirements, timelines and resources useful in staying on track for graduation. Montana Western staff adheres to Montana University System (MUS) guidelines for course placement by utilizing ACT and SAT scores to determine appropriate introductory classes.

“Participants report having a better sense of control in their lives after only three or four visits with a master’s level counselor” (2009/2010 Student Handbook/Datebook). In addition to personal counseling, Montana Western’s counselor coordinates educational health campaigns, assists with students in crisis, initiates referrals to appropriate medical and mental health resources, and collaborates with the Director of Residence Life to team teach a six hour course for students with disciplinary infractions related to alcohol and drugs. The Residence Life staff provides a comfortable living learning environment to over 300 students living on campus. Students living on and off campus utilize services provided by a local community health center.

The auxiliary services at Montana Western include dining services and the bookstore. Dining services is an “in-house” service and operates the cafeteria operation in Mathews Hall and Bark N Bite in the Student Union. For convenience and to accommodate “block” schedules, the cafeteria is open weekdays from 7 am to 6:30 pm with three hot meal times throughout the day. Twenty-three percent of dining services food items are locally or regionally grown as a part of the Farm to College program. Featured food items include local beef and potatoes, Beaverhead honey, potatoes from Whitehall, miscellaneous Montana sauces, and Washington apples. The bookstore, also “in-house”, offers new and used textbooks, Montana Western clothing and gifts, and art and classroom supplies.

Standard 3. E – Intercollegiate Athletics

Intercollegiate athletics at the University of Montana Western is comprised of seven teams – men’s and women’s basketball, men’s and women’s golf, men’s and women’s rodeo, football, and volleyball. The teams are very competitive, frequently ranking near the top in the National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Frontier Conference competition. The athletics director is quite diligent in his work to maintain compliance with conference and university regulations. The faculty athletic representative ensures compliance with eligibility. The assistant director works with the business office for proper accounting of scholarships, revenue and expenses.

Policy 3.1 – Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment and Representation of Accredited Status

Student recruitment, registration, and marketing are handled by very qualified professionals. The professionals in these areas have worked collaboratively and diligently to “tell the Montana Western story” of Experience One and the value of experiential learning. There is no indication that Montana Western recruitment professionals provide disallowed assurances or misrepresent job placement, program costs, or abilities required.

University of Montana-Western appropriately describes its affiliations and accreditation status on page 18 of *The University of Montana Western 2009/2010 Catalog*. The section explaining Montana Western accreditation reads as follows: “The University of Montana Western is a member of: The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). The University of Montana Western is accredited by: The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). The University of Montana Western teacher education programs are accredited by: The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The University of Montana Western has received specialized accreditation for its Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Applied Science degree programs in business through: The International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE), Olathe, Kansas.”

Standard Four – Faculty

Standard 4.A – Faculty Selection, Evaluation, Roles, Welfare, and Development

Faculty at Montana Western, through the Faculty Association, are covered by a collective bargaining agreement with the Montana Board of Regents of higher education. This agreement spells out policies for hiring, evaluation, workload, and other faculty issues.

Each program is also represented on the Faculty Senate as part of a shared governance model where faculty are able to debate, discuss, and make recommendations to the chancellor and provost concerning issues pertaining to the academic affairs of the university. The senate consists of nine members: two from the Department of Education, one from each other program, and one at-large. Faculty members serve on the four standing committees of the senate as well as on a number of other committees that support the work of the provost's office.

Between the two organizations, faculty members have input into administrative decisions and receive ongoing reports about the direction of the university. With an extremely flat organizational structure – no academic area deans or full time department chairs – as well as an informal and friendly culture, there are few barriers to communication between an individual faculty member and the administration.

Curriculum development is the responsibility of individual departments with new courses and programs requiring approval from the Curriculum Committee prior to administrative approval. Creation and implementation of the Experience One initiative was faculty driven and has involved extensive input and discussion across the campus over a period of several years.

Individual departments also have the responsibility to determine unit standards and to define the required terminal degree in regard to hiring decisions. Once determined, unit standards go on to a faculty Unit Standards Committee for approval then on to the administration.

With the current limited resources, little hiring is taking place. Faculty feel the administration is supportive in helping with adjunct utilization and internal shifting of funds toward those departments most in need, but all acknowledge that the shortage of financial resources is straining the faculty's ability to serve student needs while continuing to pursue professional development opportunities.

POLICY 4.1

Faculty evaluation processes are spelled out in the bargaining agreement and are comprehensive and systematic. Tenure track faculty are evaluated annually and those who are tenured, semi-annually. The evaluation includes student evaluation of at least one course per semester as well as peer evaluations. Each fall, faculty must develop goals in the areas of teaching, professional development, and service and submit this report to the provost. At year end a second report with evidence of attainment of these goals is sent. The provost receives each faculty report and responds to it along with identifying steps for improvement if necessary.

Standard 4.B – Scholarship, Research and Artistic Creation

Montana Western faculty members are engaged in scholarship, research, and artistic creation. Samples of work by the faculty included 18 publications (sixteen articles and two books) representing twenty-four of the forty-five tenure/tenure track faculty at Montana-Western. The eighteen faculty members represent six of the eight departments at Montana Western (Biology, Business and Technology, Education, English, Environmental Science and History, Philosophy and Social Science). To an increasing extent under Experience One, faculty members include students in their research. Every April, there is a student research conference on campus that includes mostly science research projects.

The collective bargaining agreement (CBA) between the University of Montana Western Faculty Association and the Board of Regents of Higher Education – Montana University System specifies general parameters regarding continued professional growth on pages 18 and 19. In particular, on page 18 it states that “No faculty member may be promoted to full professor on the basis of teaching and service alone.” The CBA also provides criteria for the creation and change of departmental unit standards for the evaluation of faculty. The faculty members in each of the departments create, review, assess, and change or maintain the unit standards of their particular departments, subject to the review of the university-wide Unit Standards Committee, which consists of one representative from each academic unit and the provost. The unit standards for each of the departments require scholarship, research, or creative activity as a requirement for promotion to associate professor, tenure, or promotion to full professor.

Block scheduling provides almost all tenured and tenure track faculty members with one non-teaching block each semester to be used for professional development which includes scholarship, research, and artistic creation. The CBA requires that a minimum of two funded sabbaticals be made available each academic year. Sabbaticals are funded at full pay for one semester and at two-thirds pay for two semesters.

Grant funding supports some faculty in their research efforts. The amount of grant funding received by faculty for a campus of this size is exceptional, especially given that there is no office that supports these efforts. Grant activity and funding both increased for the 2009-2010 academic year. The dean of outreach and research provided stipends to faculty during summer 2009 to write grants, and this helped increase grant activity. Not all submitted grants were funded, and this was especially true for those submitted by faculty in the Department of Education. Grant activity is consistent with Montana Western’s mission and goals.

In a manner consistent with the BOR, the CBA details institutional policies regarding academic freedom to pursue scholarship, research, and artistic creation. The CBA also includes a section on academic responsibility which includes the statement “to treat the non-teaching block as a faculty-directed period of professional development and scholarly/creative activities.”

Standard Five: Library & Information Resources

Standard 5.A – Purpose And Scope

The Carson Library mission and service pledge, posted on its web site, are consistent with this standard, which calls for it to “support teaching, learning, and if applicable, research” in line with the institution’s mission and goals, and to provide “adequate library and information sources and services, at the appropriate level for degrees offered, . . . to support the intellectual, cultural, and technical development of students enrolled in courses and programs wherever located and however delivered.” The Swysgood Technology Center (STC), while under the library director’s administration, is not explicitly encompassed by the Carson Library mission statement, nor does it have (or at least prominently publicize) its own, unless overlooked by the reviewer. However, all evidence gathered by observation or report, along with documentation provided, attests that it serves a similar mission, extended more specifically into the realm of academic and instructional information technologies. This includes support of the library’s own technological needs. Both entities adequately fulfill their complementary missions. Some specific strengths and weaknesses are addressed below.

Standard 5.B - Information Resources and Services

The library and STC each, within their appropriate spheres, select, acquire, organize, and maintain equipment and “materials” – more broadly, information resources in all formats including electronic – to support Montana Western’s educational program (5.B.1). They provide opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to participate in this process (5.B.4) at a variety of levels, including a simple suggestion form for new acquisitions, a Library and Technology Advisory Committee that may weigh in on these matters, a Student Computer Use Committee that makes actual selection and funding decisions for equipment purchases, and a system of departmental allocations that affords the faculty opportunities for a substantial role in collection development.

Intensive use is made of computing and communications services to “extend the boundaries in obtaining data from other sources, including regional, national, and international networks” (5.B.5). This includes, notably, an effective and efficient technology-mediated interlibrary loan service. But it encompasses most dramatically the vast array of information resources accessible online, including many proprietary databases and information services made available through subscription or licensing. In this domain the library truly shines. It provides Montana Western’s students and faculty, whether on campus or at remote locations, with a breadth and depth of online information resources that are exceptional for an institution of its size, scope, and financial resources. A few examples not found at just any academic institution include: *ARTstor*, all or most *JSTOR* collections, the American Chemical Society journals collection, *Biological Abstracts*, *ScienceDirect*, *PsycARTICLES*, *American Periodical Series*, *New York Times Historical*, *ReferenceUSA* (Business), and some 160,000 e-books through *NetLibrary*. Credit for this remarkably rich virtual collection goes in large measure to a cooperative relationship with the University of Montana–Missoula Library, along with a state-funded program of select databases common to all Montana libraries; but it also reflects diligent effort and judicious decisions by the library staff.

Physical collections are not neglected, and there is a good if far more modest selection, with continuing growth or replacement, of books, DVDs, CDs, and other physical formats. Noted particularly is a good representation of materials supporting Montana Western's more unusual curricular offerings, such as equine studies and environmental interpretation. Circulation and in-house use data attest to continuing use of these physical collections. Acquisition of print journals and magazines is diminishing steadily, for good reason given user preferences and the immense periodical resources available online. One significant lacuna may be current and recent issues of leading and usually expensive disciplinary journals that are not included in full text databases, or only with embargoes of one or more years. But here interlibrary loan appears to serve as an adequate substitute.

The institution has commendably provided budget increases for information resources over the past several years – e.g., 25 percent cumulatively from FY 2006 to FY 2010 – allowing the library to keep pace with inflation in this category. (Some figures on page 109 of the Self Study that seem to call this into question were clarified as resulting from changes in reporting definitions and requirements over this period.)

The library staff puts substantial effort into developing the ability of students and faculty to use the resources independently and effectively (5.B.2). It offers a growing number of instruction sessions – forty in 2008-09, across a wide range of subjects – to teach use of specific resources, typically tailored to a specific course and assignment, and to advance students' general information literacy. This usually includes several sections of COMS 101 (now CAPS 101) or COMS 115, introductory level computer courses aimed in part at preparing students for an information and technology literacy test administered by the Department of Business and Technology but required of all students (2009-10 *Catalog*, p. 61). Faculty and students speak positively of the instruction program.

The library's web site at the time of the review offered several online research guides or tutorials in specific curricular areas, developed by the librarians. These represented a commendable effort, but proved to be outdated and slated for removal from the web site. There are no specific plans to renew or expand this venue for "time-of-need" instruction. This merits at least further consideration, but with due recognition that such online aids, both in initial creation and upkeep, make significant time demands that are difficult to manage for a small staff.

The collection development policy posted on the library's web site is embryonic, except in the case of policy regarding acquisition of textbooks and instructional software. But it covers the basic parameters of collection development and reflects the observed make-up of the collections: formats acquired, special collections, and collection categories such as circulating and reference. It would benefit from further development, including guidelines for difficult or potentially controversial choices in allocating information resource funds among various formats and subject fields.

Standard 5.C – Facilities and Access

The library and the connected STC occupy a central location on campus and are readily accessible to all students and faculty. The resources and services they offer together appear from all available evidence to be substantially "sufficient in quality, level, breadth, quantity, and

currency to meet the requirements of the educational program” (5.C.1), given that they are complemented or supplemented by other campus facilities, such as technology-equipped classrooms and some satellite computer labs, and by external information resources made available to Montana Western students, faculty, and staff. This judgment does not imply absence of sporadic facility, resource, or service gaps that can be addressed through available channels for effecting improvements or re-ordering priorities. There is, for instance, some indication that hardware adequate to handle specialized software used by certain departments might be slighted in favor of general-purpose technologies that possibly are updated at a somewhat more aggressive rate than essential. The reviewer does not draw a definite conclusion on this, but recommends that the relevant personnel and committees consider this issue. Also expressed were needs for more training, for example, on use of equipment such as smart boards or on the widely used WebCT utility and its pending replacement, the latter heard from several quarters including the School of Outreach.

The STC is a particularly attractive, inviting, and functional facility. The library, though remodeled as recently as 2002, looks a bit worn and less inviting on the whole, but it is functional and well organized. Recent rearrangement of the second-floor book stacks for ADA compliance represented a significant amount of work resulting in improved accessibility.

The number of library and STC open hours was frequently mentioned to the reviewer as a source of student complaints, or at least requests for expansion. However, weekly library hours are generous on comparisons within the Montana higher education system, and staff base decisions about this on good data regarding actual usage, and with an eye toward good stewardship of limited library and institutional funds. A couple of related issues that were raised may deserve investigation and perhaps action if substantiated: (a) that actual library hours are not always as publicized, possibly as a result of reliance at certain times on unsupervised student workers; (b) that reduced hours in the periods between blocks unreasonably restrict access, especially to computers, needed by students in “stringer” or “stretch” classes. The library staff has already demonstrated responsiveness to student concerns by adjusting Saturday library hours as result of a student survey.

The library’s very substantial proprietary online information sources are accessible anywhere on campus through IP address recognition. They are also accessible to all off-campus students, faculty, and staff through a simple user authentication procedure via a proxy server managed by the STC. One challenge for off-campus access to library resources, as well as to the WebCT course management system supported by STC, is the issue of bandwidth, with some users still reliant on dial-up access or otherwise restricted bandwidth. This is largely beyond Montana Western’s staff control – it is reportedly being addressed at the state level – but it is important to communicate clearly to off-campus constituencies the minimum requirements and expectations for effective use of Montana Western’s online resources and utilities, especially for participation in online courses.

Cooperative agreements and relationships with other libraries, networks, and consortia—including those that undergird interlibrary lending—are crucial to fulfillment of the library’s mission. But these “complement rather than substitute for the institution’s own adequate and accessible core collections and services” (5.C.2). The relationship with the University of Montana-Missoula Library is particularly important and beneficial. The reviewer was not able to view formal documentation of this or other agreements, but was given to understand it exists.

Standard 5.D - Personnel and Management

The combined staff of the library and STC is small given the institution's size and scope of programs. Nonetheless, they succeed in providing the standard complement of library and instructional technology resources found on most contemporary campuses, as well as offering the standard range of services supporting use of these resources. In part they are able to accomplish this through their relationship with the University of Montana–Missoula library, which not only enhances access to resources (as noted under 5.C) but also provides for economies of scale and staffing efficiencies, for example in administration of the integrated library system (Voyager) and selection, acquisition, and management of online databases. Even so, it's clear and understandable that staff members feel stretched. Available evidence, while limited – student and faculty comments, usage data, limited user surveys – indicates the staff nonetheless manage to provide the resources and services they do at levels of quality and quantity that satisfy users and meet the needs of the educational program. They are probably working at the limits of their capacity or of reasonable expectations, however.

All library and STC personnel are well qualified for their positions by education and/or experience. Librarians and the instructional technologist have appropriate degrees. Responsibilities of paraprofessional staff are clearly defined by job descriptions. The reviewer had opportunity to examine a job description for just one of the three professional staff, so lacks evidence of equally clear definitions of responsibilities for librarians and the instructional technologist. But the librarians demonstrate a highly collaborative approach to their work that permits sharing of many responsibilities (e.g., reference service, instruction, collection development) based on schedules, availability, areas of strength, or other such factors, rather than rigid delineation, while observing de facto clear divisions of labor where necessary or appropriate, as in the case of administrative responsibilities. The instructional technologist demonstrated a sound understanding of his responsibilities as defined largely by the functions of the STC.

Opportunities for professional growth and development are limited. Librarians, though they carry faculty titles and ranks, are not considered faculty in the full sense, hence are not eligible for faculty development and research funds. The small library/STC budget for professional development – currently \$800 for the entire staff of six – is a concern for an area where change is rapid and constant and the demand for currency high. To cite but one example: the assistant librarian's job description lists "engage in continuing education and professional development" among her "typical duties and responsibilities." That is indeed important for her duties in the library, but all the more in that her job description also requires teaching "a minimum of one class per year in the University's K-12 Library Media Education Program." Yet it seems there is little support for this.

Organizational relationships between the library and the STC – administered by a single director, advised by a common committee of campus representatives and staff, and sharing responsibility for certain areas such as the library web site – lend substance to a recognized need for linkages among these resource and service units (5.D.4; also 5.E.2). The STC technologist values his relationship to the library as an academic unit focused on students and faculty. At the same time, he appears to enjoy an effective relationship with the information and telecommunications services director and staff, often serving as the "face" for ITS with respect to its academic constituencies, and the conduit whereby their problems and issues are

communicated to ITS. By the same token, ITS personnel seem to be responsive to, and on good working terms with, the library director and instructional technologist. The principal formal mechanism facilitating the relationship between the library/STC on the one hand and ITS on the other is the Technology Steering Committee, which has wide and high-level campus representation, including the two vice-chancellors. This committee deals with significant technology decisions, particularly those affecting multiple departments. It appears to provide an effective process, perceived as fair by the participants and others, for negotiating competing needs and demands for technology resources and funds, including those of the academic vis-à-vis the administrative or general domains. On a day-to-day basis, the apparent good health of the library/STC/ITS relationship may be a product chiefly of institutional culture and the personalities of the individuals involved. No doubt this is as good as, or better than, any additional formal structure or mechanisms. The expressed general satisfaction with existing arrangements and divisions of labor seems amply justified. It is, however, an area that may require attention with future turnover in personnel, changing patterns of technology utilization, or institutional growth. Some recognition of this came through in conversations with key personnel.

There is no evidence that the institution consults library and information resources staff in curriculum development (5.D.5). At any rate there is no systematic provision for this. Librarians are not included or even eligible to serve in curricular decision-making bodies, presumably because they are not classified as faculty, though given courtesy faculty titles and ranks. The form used to propose new curricular initiatives includes a place to note implications for the library (or by extension the STC), but it neither requires consultation with the library director or staff nor, reportedly, does much in practice to encourage it.

Standard 5.E Evaluation and Planning

Library and STC planning benefit, as the institutional self study notes, from the involvement of several advisory and decision-making committees referenced previously. It is informed from above by the library director's reporting relationship to the provost and participation in the Academic Council, and by institutional strategic planning processes that are transparent and widely communicated.

Evaluation is less robust than desirable. But more evaluation actually occurs than the institutional self study reveals, and it goes beyond the collection and analysis of statistical data and their use in decisions about services or information resource acquisitions, or the communication provided through committees – all of which the reviewer confirms and affirms. In the category of evaluating “customer satisfaction” are some results, though on a very broad plane, of the 2006 Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey. On three questions regarding adequacy of library resources and services and computer labs, and helpfulness and approachability of library staff, survey scores uniformly (a) made substantial gains from a 1998 survey, (b) show decreasing gaps between students' ratings of importance and their levels of satisfaction, and (c) pulled even with or exceeded national averages for 4-year public institutions. These evaluation results, though already somewhat dated and, of course, not at all fine-grained, demonstrate substantial overall improvements in the past decade and an encouraging trajectory. Hopefully the institution can repeat this survey in the near future. The library director also provided the reviewer with results of a Library Services and Satisfaction

Group Survey conducted recently by a business class as a student project. This too provides some helpful evaluative information, and might profitably be repeated and perhaps expanded.

Finally and most substantially, in the category of learning outcomes assessment, the library some years ago collaborated with the Department of Business and Technology to develop a computerized Information and Technology Literacy Test subsequently administered on a continuing basis by the latter department. The test includes a number of components based on the Association of College and Research Libraries *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, along with components based on several standards relating specifically to technology literacy and basic computer skills. It is required of all Montana Western students prior to graduation and may be taken repeatedly (2009-10 *Catalog*, p. 61; referred to these, a bit misleadingly, as “computer competency test”). That this is not mentioned in the institutional self study is surprising. While the librarians turned out to be aware of the test, and in fact teach units in several courses designed in part to prepare students for it, results are not regularly shared with them. This appears a more than regrettable oversight. The Department of Business and Technology and the library are urged to reinvigorate their collaboration on relevant portions of the test, especially as it’s due to be updated in summer 2010. Even more important, librarians are urged to make sure they regularly receive test results and use them to improve their instructional efforts. Montana Western deserves praise for the test and associated requirement; they exceed what has been attained on many campuses. But it should use results to greater advantage to guide and improve achievement of information literacy objectives.

Standard Six – Governance and Administration

Standard 6.A – Governance System

The University of Montana Western is a part of a multi-unit system: the Montana University System (MUS). The system is divided into three parts: the University of Montana, Montana State University, and three community colleges. Montana Western is one of three schools operating under the auspices of the University of Montana. By state constitution, the governance of the University of Montana Western is vested in the Montana Board of Regents (hereafter BOR or regents) of Higher Education, which serves as the governing board for the entire Montana University System. The regents appoint a commissioner who serves as the chief administrative officer of the Montana University System.

The Board of Regents has developed a set of policies and procedures that govern campus operations. They outline clearly the authority, responsibilities, and relationship among and between the governing board, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Discussion with each of these parties reveals that each understands its respective roles as set forth in the policies and procedures. An elaborate BOR-level committee structure which provides representation of these parties provides an opportunity for consideration of faculty, student, and staff perspectives. In addition, each of Western's upper level administrators works with counterparts at the other institutions and the appropriate deputy commissioner for higher education to develop positions and proposals prior to their presentation to the commissioner and the regents.

Although some aspects of working within a multi-layered system are at times challenging, the senior administrators at Montana Western indicate that the current structure has benefitted Montana Western financially and by garnering additional support for new initiatives. Independent conversations with Western's Chancellor Storey, University of Montana President Dennison, and Commissioner Sterns revealed a healthy relationship and deep respect among the three. Both President Dennison and Commissioner Sterns revealed an impressively high level of understanding about and passion for Western's initiatives, strengths, and challenges. They clearly know this university and, informed by those on the ground in Dillon, appear to have its best interests at heart. Similar deep knowledge and insights about Montana Western also were obvious in conversations with Regents Barrett and Buchanan.

Standard 6.B – Governing Board

The seven-member governing board, the Board of Regents, is appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state senate. In addition, the governor, the superintendent of public instruction, and the commissioner serve in non-voting *ex officio* roles. One member is a student who typically serves a one-year term but may be appointed for up to four years; the remaining regents are appointed to seven-year terms. The appointment process is regularized, and neither the chancellor nor the president serves as a member of the board.

The regents, by policy, act as a committee of the whole, and board responsibilities are outlined in detail in the board's policy manual. A Code of Expectations sets expectations for the actions of board members and explicitly enjoins members from any conflict of interest particularly as it

relates to their fiduciary responsibilities. The BOR selects, appoints, and regularly evaluates the chief executive officer of the Montana University System and the presidents of the University of Montana and Montana State University. Upon the advice of the commissioner and the appropriate university president, the BOR also appoints the chancellors of each university in the system.

According to policy, the BOR reviews and approves each institution's mission statement every three years. It also approves all programs of study, degrees, certificates, and diplomas consisting of 30 credits or more. When the institution proposes substantive changes in its mission, policies, and programs, it must gain approval from the BOR before proceeding. The BOR regularly evaluates its own performance and revises its policies to ensure effective and efficient operation. It delegates approval of the academic structure of each of its member institutions to the commissioner, president, and chancellor. The BOR maintains fiduciary oversight for each institution in the Montana University System. The process is described in detail in the evaluation team's response to Standard 7.

The board requires each institution to submit to regional accreditation, is knowledgeable about the standards, and reviews the institution's regional accreditation status.

In addition to the BOR, the governor appoints for each campus a three-member Local Executive Board to staggered three-year terms to facilitate communication between Montana Western and the Dillon community.

Standard 6.C – Leadership and Management

Chancellor Richard Storey serves the institution in a full-time capacity. His duties, responsibilities, and ethical conduct requirements are set down by the BOR and overseen by the MUS Commissioner. He directly supervises and evaluates a five-member administrative team based on annual goals that are submitted by team members. All administrators operate under the expectations for ethical behavior set forth in the Standards of Conduct for State Employees of the state of Montana.

Chancellor Storey arrived at Montana Western in 2004 and has developed an outstanding reputation for openness and transparency. A soft-spoken man who is addressed by first name by administrators, faculty, staff, and students alike, he solicits input on virtually all decisions from affected groups. He meets every other week with his 12-member senior staff council and monthly with an expanded university council which also serves as the strategic planning committee. In addition, he solicits input from the Faculty Senate and the Student Senate. The evidence suggests that he carefully weighs input from all constituents, and this input frequently influences decisions and policies. Although this inclusive process in decision-making is time-consuming, the process itself is timely and the outcome is a campus where each individual has a voice. The chancellor also expects and models cooperative working relationships among units on campus. Communication channels are both formal and informal, but as one staff member reported, "We simply all talk to each other."

Vice Chancellor for Administration, Finance, and Student Affairs Susan Briggs also appears to be highly respected for her inclusiveness and most especially for her patience in explaining the state's somewhat complex budgeting system. She is credited for outstanding management of

finite and, in fact, scarce resources and manages along with Chancellor Storey and Provost Karl Ulrich to achieve consensus on direction even when it means that some group's priorities are not among those funded. Vice Chancellor Briggs supervises and evaluates four direct reports.

Provost Ulrich also appears to have earned the respect of the campus. Like Dick (Storey) and Susan (Briggs), Karl (Ulrich) is addressed by students and staff alike by first name. He works with departments and programs to establish funding and programmatic priorities and keeps lines of communication open. He supervises and evaluates four direct reports. His support of the faculty-initiated and faculty-led transition to Experience One has earned him considerable good will with the faculty.

Amberly Pahut serves as the director of development and alumni relations and also as director of the Montana Western Foundation. She reports to Chancellor Storey and together they ensure that the goals of development are consistent with the institution's mission and strategic plan. Although the foundation is independent from the university and operates and functions at arm's length, they cooperate for the good of the institution. The chancellor works with the foundation executive director to determine funding levels to name projects, endow chairs or professorships, and name scholarships among other activities, and these actions are guided by both university and the BOR's naming policy.

In addition, Chancellor Storey supervises and evaluates the director of marketing and university relations and the director of athletics.

Although no one administrator is responsible for institutional research, the administrative team at Montana Western establishes performance indicators, routinely reviews the results, and communicates the findings to the campus and larger community. At the institutional level, the results of assessment and evaluation articulate back through programs and processes almost by word of mouth. It's really quite remarkable.

Policies related to staff and administrative appointments and terminations exist in the BOR Policy Manual, which is published and accessible, and in those of the University of Montana Missoula, and UMW. Like other policies, they are frequently reviewed and updated as necessary.

Standard 6.D – Faculty Role in Governance

Two formal mechanisms exist through which faculty can provide input to decision-making: the Faculty Senate and the Faculty Association (the bargaining unit.) The Senate addresses matters related to curriculum, instruction, academic policies, and program assessment and is local to the institution. The Faculty Union works through a contract established at the MUS level and addresses matters related to salary, working conditions, and faculty evaluation. Both appear to be mature organizations, and their influence derives both from their skillful presentation of their issues and concerns and the sincere interest of the administration in giving them voice. In addition, members of the faculty are included on virtually all committees of the university and also have influence informally because of the open door policy the chancellor has established.

Standard 6.E – Student Role in Governance

The Associated Students of the University of Montana Western and the Student Senate provide formal avenues for the student role in governance. The president of ASUMW meets frequently with the chancellor, and sits on the MUS associated student organization. Student senators represent students on university committees in which their interests are matters of committee business, for example the Strategic Planning Committee and the Information Technology Committee. The students whom we interviewed were very positive about their role in governance and affirmed that they are given voice in important decisions that influence them. That is not to say that they didn't raise issues, among them parking, the limited internet band width particularly in the residence halls, meal packages in the residence halls, and what they viewed as arbitrary decisions about requests to withdraw from residence hall contract. Still, the students affirmed that they have many opportunities to present their concerns to the administration and appear to feel completely involved in and aware of campus decisions.

Policy 6.1 – Affirmative Action and Non-Discrimination

Montana Western operates under Section 703 of the BOR Policy Manual which specifies that "Each campus of the Montana University System shall insure that no employment or educational policy is discriminatory on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, political ideas, sex, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, national origin, or ancestry unless based on reasonable grounds." Similarly, its pursuit of affirmative action and equal opportunity are directed by the Policy 406.4 of the University of Montana. It appears that the campus makes every effort to carry out the policy in its hiring and admissions practices. The ethnic and racial diversity of the student body stands at 8.6 percent, a significant percentage given its location in a county that is 95 percent white/Caucasian.

Policy 6.2 – Collective Bargaining

Both faculty and classified staff at Montana Western are members of collective bargaining units. However, in neither case do these agreements contravene the requirements of the commission's standards or unduly disrupt the educational process of the institution. The faculty bargaining unit, the Faculty Association, operates under a Collective Bargaining Agreement and seat members of the Labor-Management Committee. The classified staff only recently entered into bargaining under the auspices of the Montana Public Employees Association. The bargaining unit and the Staff Association which provides a staff voice in governance, appear to work hand-in-hand to ensure that concerns of the classified staff are heard by the various institutional governing bodies.

The evidence suggests that the self-study process included representatives from the entire campus community and that the views of all members were considered in preparation of the report.

Standard Seven - Finance

Standard 7.A - Financial Planning

The University of Montana Western is governed by a seven member Board of Regents (BOR) appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state senate.

The budget process is driven by the state's budget timeline. The campus prepares and submits a two year budget request to the Montana University System (MUS) for submission as part of the MUS request in the governor's appropriation budget. The Montana legislature establishes a lump sum appropriation to the MUS, which is distributed to the campuses on a "base plus cost" basis model, agreed to each biennium between the MUS fiscal officers, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, (OCHE), the Governor's Budget Office, and the BOR budget committee and approved by the BOR. The development of the Montana Western annual operating budget is led by the campus Budget Committee. The Budget Committee is responsible for recommending a balanced budget to the chancellor using the Montana Western Strategic Plan as a guide. All evidence reviewed suggests that this is an open, transparent process that engages the campus and connects with the Montana Western Strategic Plan.

Long and short-range capital planning is guided by the campus master plan. Debt for capital outlay is reviewed and controlled and does not create an unreasonable drain on resources available for educational purposes.

Standard 7.B – Adequacy of Financial Reserves

Funding is largely dependent on the State of Montana with 58 percent of the 2009-10 general fund operating budget revenue coming from state appropriations. The institution has built and maintains fund balances and reserves adequate to provide for enrollment fluctuations, minor calamities, and other contingencies.

Debt service schedules are maintained and appropriate annual debt service reserve transfers are required and made.

Standard 7.C - Financial Management

The chancellor regularly reports on the financial performance of the university to the Board of Regents.

Budget, planning, and business functions are centralized and under the authority of the vice chancellor for administration and finance who reports directly to the chancellor. All of these areas are adequately, albeit leanly, staffed by professional, experienced, and knowledgeable staff.

The internal audit function is provided by The University of Montana Office of Internal Audit. This office reports to the president of The University of Montana and works on all four campuses. Audit reports are formally prepared, findings and recommendations communicated, and follow up to campus responses scheduled and made.

The institution complies with all aspects of financial management, reporting, and audit requirements as evidenced by audited financial statements and independent auditor's report and internal audit reports.

Standard 7.D – Fundraising and Development

The Montana Western Foundation is incorporated separately as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Its sole purpose is to raise funds for the university in the areas of scholarships, faculty development, and capital projects. The relationship between the university and the foundation is defined in an agreement signed by both parties. All investment activities are governed by policy with oversight provided by foundation board members. All fund raising activities are governed by policy, comply with government requirements, and are conducted in a professional and ethical manner as evidenced by audited financial statements and independent auditor's report.

Standard Eight – Physical Resources

Standard 8.A – Instructional and Support Facilities

The University of Montana Western is situated on 39 acres with a total of 689,281 square feet of usable space.

The institution is currently remodeling Main Hall, its primary classroom building. Funding for this project is provided by the Montana Long Range Building Program and federal stimulus funds. The most recent addition to campus, the Swysgood Technology Center, was completed in 2002. The Birch Creek Center, approximately twenty miles from campus, provides outdoor education opportunities.

The majority of evidence suggests that the deferred maintenance of facilities needs improvements, and that there is a concern that resources are not adequate to ensure that all deferred maintenance projects can be performed on a proactive rather than reactive basis. Current deferred maintenance backlog is approximately \$9M. The campus makes efforts to redirect institutional funds, whenever possible, to fund deferred maintenance improvements. It also requests deferred maintenance funding from the state each biennium through the Long-Range Building and Planning (LRBP) program.

Standard 8.B – Equipment and Materials

Equipment for instructional programs appears to be adequate and is inventoried, controlled, and maintained. Although the university has a formal equipment plan which is on cycle and fully-funded for the highest priority items, conversations with faculty and staff revealed that funding is not always available to meet departmental and unit equipment and materials needs.

Standard 8.C – Physical Resource Planning

Montana Western's current master plan was developed in 2003 and is formally reviewed each year. The plan calls for an update in 2009. The campus is behind on this goal. The campus development committee has now started to work on the update.

The institution is a member of The American College and University President's Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) and has developed a carbon reduction plan. Though the plan does not yet establish a date for carbon neutrality, the campus has taken steps toward that goal. They have a Sustainability Committee whose primary focus is energy efficiency. The centerpiece of their energy conservation efforts is their biomass boiler project. This project was completed in 2007 and has virtually eliminated the use of natural gas and reduced related energy costs by 50%.

The facilities are sufficient to support the mission and goals of the university. The facilities management department has been able to maintain the buildings, grounds, and support infrastructure in a manner more than adequate to meet the needs of the Institution.

Concern: The Institution's deferred maintenance backlog is not adequately funded. The campus should continue to proactively work to secure and develop funding adequate to address the backlog. (Standard 8.A)

Standard Nine – Institutional Integrity

A number of official documents set down expectations for ethical behavior on the part of faculty, administration, staff, and students. Although some of these expectations are set down in state-level or BOR documents, others are referenced in the Montana Western Policies and Procedures Manual, the Montana Western Catalog, and the Montana Western Student Handbook. Expectations are explicit and are typical in sum of those that, when followed, result in institutional integrity. Policies are widely distributed.

The evidence is that these policies drive practice and describe expectations that are shared by the entire community. When violations occur, and they appear to be extraordinarily rare, supervisors take appropriate action. Policies are reviewed periodically and revised to ensure they provide guidance to constituents.

University publications represent the institution accurately and consistently, aided in part by the hiring of a marketing and public relations director who now reviews and, along with the chancellor and the provost, approves all documents for external distribution. Although these relatively recent tight controls have created some frustration, virtually all staff and faculty report that the oversight was necessary in the short term to re-establish a consistent university brand.

Board of Regents policies explicitly proscribe conflict of interest, which the policy clearly defines. The Collective Bargaining Agreement and a 2007 policy addition to the Montana Western Policies and Procedures Manual reinforces the prohibition.

The Student Handbook outlines a student code of conduct which is also posted on the Montana Western website. Students in particular programs—for example, teacher education—are expected to know and abide by professional standards in the discipline.

An affirmative action officer oversees recruitment and hiring to ensure that state and federal affirmative action and equal opportunity policies are enforced.

State and MUS regulations govern procurement of supplies and services, and Montana Western's compliance is overseen by the director of business services and the vice chancellor for administration and finance.

Academic freedom is a strongly held value at Montana Western and is guaranteed under provisions of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Policy 9.1 Institutional Integrity

The provisions of Policy 9.1 are consistent with institutional policies, values, and practices. The free pursuit of knowledge is at the heart of the experiential learning approach.

Summary

Montana Western is an institution at a new beginning fueled in part by the successful faculty-led and staff-supported conversion to Experience One and by the warmth, transparency, and openness of the current chancellor and his leadership team. The evaluation team respectfully submits the following commendations and recommendations.

Commendations

Commendation 1: The evaluation team commends the University of Montana Western for its design of Experience One and the entire campus community on the foresight, spirit, hard work, and tenacity associated with realizing the vision of experiential learning and adjusting operations, policies, and protocols to advance block scheduling. As the only public institution in the nation to have achieved a successful implementation of this experiential system, Montana Western has remained true to its mission. Through a thoughtful program of marketing, the university has recruited students who are drawn to this approach to teaching and learning, increased its enrollment, and dramatically improved its freshman-to-sophomore retention rate. As a result of the national recognition of Experience One, the university has improved its reputation within the Montana Higher Education System.

Commendation 2: The evaluation team commends the administration, faculty and staff of the University of Montana Western for creating a culture of caring, respect, and approachability where students feel supported in their personal growth and educational pursuits.

Commendation 3: The evaluation team commends the University of Montana Western for the thoughtful and inclusive process it employed in developing a strategic plan and for the effective systems of communication and the transparency that pervades all campus decisions. The plan is particularly noteworthy because it has directed activity and resource allocation, has been regularly revisited and revised consistent with changing conditions, includes not only goals and objectives but also an action plan for which progress is systematically reviewed, and is well understood by the university and larger community.

Commendation 4: The evaluation team commends the University of Montana Western and its library for providing students and faculty, whether on campus or at remote locations, with a breadth and depth of online information resources that is exceptional for an institution of its size, scope, and financial resources. Credited in large measure to a cooperative relationship with the University of Montana Missoula Library, along with a state-funded program of select databases common to all Montana libraries, this remarkably rich virtual collection also reflects diligent effort and judicious decisions by the library staff.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The evaluation team recommends that the university develop and implement procedures necessary to accomplish the following:

- Provide students with a substantial and coherent general education program with identifiable student learning outcomes. (Policy 2.1 – General Education/Related Instruction Requirements)

- Establish program assessment procedures based on these outcomes. (Standard 2.B.2)
- Implement the assessment procedures and use the results to improve the achievement of student learning outcomes. (Standard 2.B.3)

Recommendation 2: While the evaluation team recognizes that some departments have produced exemplary assessment of student learning outcomes, it does not find evidence that the commitment to assessment has been embraced throughout the curriculum. The team therefore recommends that the institution take immediate steps to implement frequent, regular and substantive assessment of learning outcomes in all academic programs. Furthermore, the team recommends that the assessment process explicitly connect student learning outcomes to program mission, the institution's strategic plan, the budget process and the university mission. (Standard 2.B.1, 2.B.2, 2.B.3 and Policy 2.2)

Recommendation 3: As the university acknowledges, many entering students are under-prepared for college-level learning in math and writing. Therefore the team recommends that the institution continue to assess and improve its developmental mathematics and writing courses in order to heighten student competence in written communication and quantitative reasoning. (Standard 2.B.3, 2.C.6)

Appendix A: List of Interviewees

Boe Adler, Student
Michelle Anderson, faculty
Otis Anderson, classified staff
Steve Barrett, regent, Montana Higher Education System
Shauna Basile, faculty
Paula Bielenberg, classified staff
Bethany Blankenship, faculty
Amanda Bombaugh, student
Tiffany Bourelle, faculty
Joe Brandon, classified staff
Susan Briggs, vice chancellor for administration, finance, and student affairs
Todd Buchanan, regent, Montana Higher Education System
Tom Caffrey, student
Bob Campbell, classified staff
Layne Carlson, faculty
Nanette Chastine, faculty
Fredrick Chilson, faculty, chair of the business and technology department
Megan Chilson, faculty
Brett Christian, student
Ilene Cohen, administrator
Diane Conover, classified staff
Dana Cotton, faculty
Cory Creighton, classified staff
Dillon Community Health Center
George Dennison, president, University of Montana System
Mark Durham, director, athletics
James Durney, student
Bill Dwyer, classified staff
Eric Dyreson, faculty, director of the honors program
Jim Efta, director, information and telecommunication services
Kevin Engellant, faculty
Brooke Erb, classified staff
Seán Eudaily, faculty, chair of the history, philosophy, and social sciences department
Jim Falvey, faculty
Liane Forrester, director of business services, affirmative action officer
Michael Francisconi, faculty
Gary Frey, faculty
Ryann Gibson, classified staff
Jen Gilliard, faculty
Mike Gilbert, faculty
Sara Glasgow, faculty
Amanda Hagerty, student
John Hajduk, faculty
Verna Hand, classified staff
Janelle Handlos, faculty, athletic trainer
Anthony Harris, student
Nicole Hazelbaker, dean of students
Margo Heberling, classified staff
Deborah Henningsen, classified staff
Denise Holland, faculty

Kathy Hupp, manager, campus bookstore
Brian Jacobson, student
Ricki Jones, director, office of financial aid
Sarah Juran, director, The Learning Center and Career Services
Jason Karch, registrar
Michael "Jephi" Keefner, student
Christy Keye, director, TRiO program
Shelly Kessel, classified staff and assistant to the chancellor
Jack Kirkly, faculty
Anne Kish, faculty
Margareta Knopik, faculty
Vicki Lansing, classified staff
Kody Lahaye, student
Cathi Love, classified staff
Gary Lundy, faculty
Linda Lyon, faculty
Ashley Makowski, student
Tiffany Malesich, classified staff
Cheyanne Marcy, classified staff
Eva Mastandrea, faculty, chair of the fine arts department
Verna McPherson, classified staff
Brent McCabe, faculty
Cheri McCarthy, director, dining services
Jeanne Meier-Franconisi, classified staff
Brett Morehouse, classified staff
Mike Morrow, faculty, chair of the Faculty Senate
Michael Moefu, student
Mary Ann Nicholas, Local Executive Board member
Delena Norris-Tull, faculty
Roger Norris-Tull, faculty
Kent Ord, director, marketing and university relations
Amberley Pahut, director, Montana Western Foundation and director, development and alumni relations
Gloria Payne, classified staff
Mike Piazzola, director, residence life
Kelsey Pollman, student
Brian Price, assistant provost
Catherine Redhead, director, admissions and financial aid
David Regan, faculty
Candi Richardson, classified staff
Lee Richardson, lead, plant and facilities
Anneliese Ripley, dean, school of outreach
Sheila Roberts, faculty
Kevin Rompala, faculty
Denice Rust, classified staff
Kayla Schmidt, student
Michael Schulz, director, library services
Dorothy Seymour, lead, human resources
Kathy Shipman, faculty
Kathy Simpkins, classified staff
Sheila Stearns, commissioner, Montana University System
Richard Storey, chancellor
Rob Thomas, faculty
Judy Ulrich, faculty

Karl Ulrich, provost/vice chancellor, academic affairs
Chase Wanner, student
Lynn Weltzien, director, counseling services
Zack Wilson, student
Tyler Wines, student
Eric Wright, faculty
John Xanthopoulos, faculty
Pat Yeager, assistant director, athletics
Craig Zaspel, faculty
Andrew Zier, student