

Mid-Cycle Peer-Evaluation Report
for

Idaho State University
October 3-5, 2017

Report prepared by:

Nancy C. Cornwell, Ph.D.
Professor
Montana State University
Bozeman, MT

Michael W. Bowers, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science & Public Law
Department of Political Science
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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Introduction

On behalf of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), the evaluation team reviewed Idaho State University's Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report and conducted a site visit October 3-5, 2017. The purpose of the Mid-Cycle Review was to assess the likelihood that Idaho State University (ISU) will be prepared to meet the requirements and standards of the comprehensive Year Seven reaffirmation of accreditation review and to offer observations about Commission recommendations from previous self-evaluation reports. We received a very well-prepared and thorough Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report from ISU and an addendum addressing prior recommendations from the 2014 accreditation site visit and are grateful to the ISU community for the time and energy they devoted to our site visit as well as their authenticity and responsiveness to our questions and observations.

At the conclusion of the Year Seven Self-Evaluation and site visit in Fall 2014, ISU was provided with five recommendations and we were asked to review progress on Recommendations 3 & 4 (for which ISU, in 2014, was found to be substantially in compliance with the Commission's criteria for reaffirmation of accreditation, but still in need of improvement).

ISU provided a separate Ad Hoc report detailing progress on Recommendations 3 & 4 that this served as the basis for our conversations although much of the evidence for progress on these recommendations also can be found within the ISU Mid Cycle Self-evaluation.

Founded in 1901 as the Academy of Idaho, ISU is a Carnegie-classified doctoral research and teaching institution with its home in Pocatello and campuses in Meridian, Twin Falls, and Idaho Falls. It enrolls about 12,500 students in about 250 degree and certificate programs. ISU's Division of Academic Affairs includes five colleges and the Kasiska Division of Health Sciences (which houses five health science units). ISU also hosts, on the Meridian campus, the soon-to-open, private, for profit, Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Idaho State University is governed by the Idaho State Board of Education (ISBE) which oversees K-20 education in the state. ISU's mission, value and core themes as well as its strategic plan, has been vetted and approved by the ISBE.

The current president, Arthur C. Vailas, has led ISU since 2006 and has announced his plan to retire mid-2018. A search for the next president of ISU is underway.

Mission:

Idaho State University is a public research-based institution that advances scholarly and creative endeavors through academic instruction, and the creation of new knowledge, research, and artistic works. Idaho State University provides leadership in the health professions, biomedical, and pharmaceutical sciences, as well as serving the region and the nation through its environmental science and energy programs. The University provides access to its regional and rural communities through delivery of preeminent technical, undergraduate, graduate, professional, and interdisciplinary education. The University fosters a culture of diversity, and engages and impacts its communities through partnerships and services.

Vision:

ISU will be the university of choice for tomorrow's leaders, creatively connecting ideas, communities, and opportunities.

Core Themes:

Learning and Discovery

Idaho State University fosters student learning and discovery through teaching, research, and creative activity. ISU delivers high quality academic programs at all levels: technical certificates; undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees; and postgraduate professional training.

Access and Opportunity

Idaho State University provides diverse pathways to retention and graduation through educational preparation, academic and co-curricular opportunities, and extensive student support services.

Leadership in the Health Sciences

Idaho State University provides statewide leadership in the health sciences. With the academic support of its colleges and the division, the University offers a broad spectrum of degree levels and provides residency training in the health professions. New knowledge is created through biomedical, translational, clinical, rural, and health services research. Teaching, research, practice, and community partnerships provide inter-professional education and excellence in patient care. University clinics provide an environment for learning, inquiry and comprehensive health care service to the community.

Community Engagement and Impact

As an integral component of the community, Idaho State University develops partnerships and affiliations through the exchange of knowledge, resources, research, and expertise. Through a diverse university staff, faculty, and student body, ISU provides cultural, social, economic, and other opportunities to enrich the lives of citizens.

What follows is our assessment and response to the key elements of the ISU Mid-Cycle Self - Evaluation Report and observations based on additional information gleaned during the site visit.

Site Visit Overview

The site visit was very well organized and provided opportunities to meet with faculty, staff, administrators and the student president of ASISU. We had sufficient time for discussions that addressed all of our prepared questions and all follow-up questions that arose. It should be noted that because of last minute, unavoidable circumstances, the Executive Vice President and Provost was unable to participate. Vice Provost Selena Grace served as a knowledgeable resource in her place.

Our prepared questions focused on the following: 1) what ISU will need to do to demonstrate mission fulfillment in their Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report and site visit; 2) the status of developing an integrated planning model, cycle and assessment; 3) understanding of, involvement in and buy-in by stakeholders in the mission, core themes and strategic planning process; 4) efforts to increase transparency in planning; 5) resource identification and allocation to meet mission fulfillment and strategic planning priorities; 6) steps taken to address the recommendation from previous reports and site visits and; 7) evidence of assessment cycle through the exemplar program examples.

We appreciate the time the following people made to contribute to the Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report, meet, talk with us, and answer our questions:

- Arthur C. Vailas, President
- Brian Kickenlooper, Interim Chief Financial Officer
- Selena Grace, Vice Provost
- Darren Blagburn, Strategic Planner/Project Manager
- Tom Ottaway, Dean College of Business
- Joanne Tokle, Associate VP for Undergraduate Affairs
- Chris Owens, PPRA Chair/PPRA Associate Professor
- Mary Lou, Dunzik-Gougar, Assoc. Dean
- Cheryl Hansen, Associate Vice President for Facilities
- Dr. Vaughn Culbertson, Professor, College of Pharmacy (MER-VTC)
- Dr. Barb Mason, Director, Interprofessional Education, College of Pharmacy (MER-VTC)
- Dr. Paul Cady, Dean, College of Pharmacy
- Dr. Jennifer Adams, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs & Assessment/Clinical Associate Professor
- John Gribas, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Letters
- Brad Batiuk, Associate VP, Budget Office
- Andy Holland, GERC Past President
- Sandra Shropshire, GERC President (MER-VTC)
- Dorothy Sammons-Lohse, Faculty Fellow
- Debra Ronneburg, College of Technology
- Amanda Horn, College of Pharmacy
- Cindy Hill, Student Success Center
- Ann Hackert, College of Business
- Jardine Spencer, Eli M. Oboler Library
- Tracy Collum, Graduate Program
- Lisa Kidder, Informational Technology Resources Center
- Emma Wood, College of Teaching and Educational Studies
- Cathy Black, Biological Sciences (IF-VTC)
- Jessica Sargent, ASISU President
- Lewis Eakins, Director of Public Safety
- Jeff Tingey, Athletic Director
- Vince Miller, Director of Institutional Research
- Kent Tingey, VP for Advancement

- Lowell Richards, VP Student Affairs
- Randy Gaines, Chief Information Officer
- Paul Watkins, Faculty Senate Co-Chair
- Richard Jacobson, Associate VP of Research

Mid-Cycle Evaluation Part One: Overview of Institutional Assessment Plan

As stated in the 2014 Mid-Cycle self-evaluation, ISU has focused on aligning planning with assessment. This has been a notably successful process. ISU established the Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment Council (IEAC) tasked with leading the integration of planning and assessment. The IEAC is composed currently of a steering committee and eight subcommittees. Over an eighteen-month timeframe the IEAC revised ISU's mission, vision, four core themes, created a new strategic plan and built an assessment plan. A subcommittee is assigned to each core theme, accreditation/assessment/academic program review, facilities, information technology and finance. One notable strength of this new structure, as reported during the site visit by several participants, is how different units now have "a seat at the table" and are developing a common understanding of institutional priorities. The result: a peeling away of siloed decision making and a level of transparency and representation that includes branch campus representatives, staff, faculty (including faculty senate) and students (via the student senate) as well as management and administration.

ISU has invested in faculty and staff training around the new mission and strategic plan, assessment and the comprehensive planning process, and is planning to hire an assessment expert to help mitigate faculty workload concerns (part of the FY19 budget). As described during the site visit, the focus now has shifted to program level assessment and assessment schedules appear to be in place. The IEAC structure is still evolving a bit (e.g. voting, bylaws, how ISBE mandates navigate this process), but it is clear that much effort and thought has gone into this new structure for decision making and comprehensive planning.

ISU has established a cycle of assessment that will be comprehensive, intentional and rigorous. In other words, the infrastructure for a comprehensive assessment and planning model for ISU is in place. Furthermore, the core theme subcommittees have established objectives and performance indicators. ISU has created their own data management system and dashboard to track mission fulfillment. It is worth highlighting this system, because it is homebuilt and quite impressive in terms of its sophistication and usability. Within this system, users and stakeholders can track performance indicators and overall progress on objectives. IEAC established a benchmark of meeting or exceeding 80% on indicators as evidence of mission fulfillment. Currently performance indicators exceed 80% for all core themes, although in the spirit of continual assessment the core theme subcommittees (examples for subcommittee 2 and 3 were provided), are reviewing their benchmarks to insure their objectives remain valid and the indicators include benchmarks focused on continuous improvement.

Mid-Cycle Evaluation Part Two: Examples of Mission Fulfillment

ISU provided two representative examples of mission fulfillment: the Pharmacy program and the Paralegal program. Both are intended to be examples of assessment, reflection, continuous improvement and as indicators of mission fulfillment.

Pharmacy Program:

The data provided comes from the 2014-15 Pharmacy annual assessment report that is created for the program's professional accreditation. The structure and process of this annual assessment is designed to measure educational effectiveness using pass rates on the national licensure exam and the national law exam. The program also tracks admissions GPAs and uses data from American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Graduating Student Survey and Faculty Survey (administered every three years). In short, there is a good breadth and depth of assessment information that informs the program's strategic plan and goals (revised by faculty in 2015).

What remains to be seen is how these data feed back into program decisions in a comprehensive way. For example, some of the curricular deficiencies found in the program as a result of the licensure exam results have been addressed from a curricular standpoint, but data measuring the impact of those changes won't be available for several years when students in the revised curriculum take the licensure exam.

The Paralegal Program:

The Paralegal program was provided as a second example of mission fulfillment. The document provided was the 2016 Program Review Report which included a self-study report. The findings of the report listed strengths, observations and weaknesses as well as specific recommendations and action plan. While the Paralegal Program Review Report provided some comprehensive data and resulted in some excellent and promising recommendations (including investment in human resources), the ability to fully complete the assessment cycle is not evident at this point, nor is there clear indication that the resources needed to meet the recommendations are or will be committed.

Mid-Cycle Evaluation Part Three: Moving Forward to Year Seven

With its new mission and core themes in place (the satellite campuses are working on their campus strategic plans this coming fall), Idaho State University clearly has been working intently to address the recommendations in the 2014 Seven Year site visit. The work done to date has been intentional, thoughtful and well-designed. There is a new mission statement, and core themes that thoughtfully and strategically align with the mission statement and reflect the strengths of the institution as well as the priorities of the ISBE (that ISU focus on health care professions, pharmacy and biomedical sciences as part of its role as a public teaching and research university). The process and product of updating the mission statement and core themes clearly has generated energy for what is now a well-integrated planning structure and process. ISU has a robust data collection, analysis and internal reporting system. ISU's project manager

has created a user friendly, at-a-glance dashboard for administrators, unit managers and others responsible for components essential to mission fulfillment to monitor progress, including the validity of selected measures of success. The foundational framework, process and schedule for assessment of all academic programs is in. Academic Affairs hopes to have academic assessment software purchased by July, 2018. Academic Affairs has begun tackling the General Education curriculum which can be a prickly area as it crosses disciplinary boundaries as well as teaching and learning pedagogies. Work is underway to set guidelines for creating student learning outcomes (SLOs) across the General Education curriculum. Until such time, assessment plans have been approved for 144 out of 159 general education courses. The current plan shows that six to eight of the nine objectives will have been assessed at the time of the next Seven Year Accreditation site visit.

Throughout the site visit meetings, we continually asked about inclusiveness of diverse perspectives and the extent of “buy-in” or commitment to the work that ISU has undertaken. We met with a range of stakeholders from across the institution, though most were in leadership positions. However, it seems evident from the strategic planning process and from the work of the IEAC and its subcommittees that broad institution input is sought and incorporated into the integrated planning decisions and the IEAC acts authentically as advisor to the President. As mentioned earlier and in the following sections of the report, the strong foundation ISU has built for integrated and comprehensive planning as well as the thoughtful data driven system developed for authentic assessment is a real strength.

In sum, ISU has built a very strong foundation for Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report and subsequent NWCCU team site visit through its carefully and intentional framework for building a process for and culture of assessment that will provide clear evidence of mission fulfillment across indicators for the objectives related to its core themes. The investment in an assessment coordinator and in appropriate assessment software will be important steps in implementing successfully, the well-thought out plans for comprehensive assessment and continuous improvement. The challenge looking forward over the next couple of years will be to fulfill a comprehensive assessment cycle across all academic and nonacademic areas of the institution and to successfully identify and procure the resources - through new revenue or reallocation of existing revenue - to meet the commitments made in the strategic plan as well as the needs identified through the assessment cycle.

Mid-Cycle Evaluation Part Four: Update on NWCCU Recommendations

Below we share our observations about Recommendations Three and Four.

Recommendation Three:

The evaluation committee recommends that the institution integrate all campus planning into an integrated comprehensive planning process (Standard 3.A.1).

At the time of 2014 Year Seven visit, ISU was found substantially in compliance, but in need of improvement in terms of Recommendation Three. Based on our review of ISU’s Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation and the subsequent mid-cycle site visit, it is our observation that ISU has

fulfilled this recommendation and has created an admirable, inclusive and transparent process for comprehensive institutional planning. Its committee structure is inclusive and is built for process-driven decision making. ISU has invested in building understanding of the new processes across units and the new integrative, and transparent structure seems to really chip away at institutional silos and “back room” agreements.

Recommendation Four:

The evaluation committee recommends that the institution continue to work to clarify the ways in which it will use assessment results to inform and strengthen programs and services, and to demonstrate institutional improvement, mission fulfillment, and sustainability. (Standards 4.A, 4.B, 5.A, and 5).

The team is pleased to see the implementation of a systematic accreditation process. Clearly the university has taken the recommendations of previous NWCCU visits to heart and has worked vigorously and conscientiously to implement a systematic academic and nonacademic assessment. The Comprehensive Assessment Plan is exactly that: comprehensive. The efforts of the IEAC, AAAPR, UARC, and NAARC are truly laudatory. The university should be absolutely proud of its efforts in this area since the last accreditation visit.

The university is in an especially good place with General Education assessment. As is generally known and understood, it is the most difficult piece of academic assessment. The university has a very successful structure in place including the aforementioned committees and GERC. This is quite the accomplishment for a process that essentially began in 2015. Student Learning Outcomes appear to be in place for General Education courses and courses meeting General Education requirements have been vetted for appropriateness in meeting each specific requirement.

In reviewing the nine objectives two per year beginning in Spring 2018, it is likely that 6-8 will be completed by the next seven-year visit. It is unclear to us whether that pace and level of incompleteness will satisfy the seven-year evaluation team and, ultimately, the Commission.

- We would very much encourage the university (perhaps the ALO) to have a conversation with NWCCU to get a feel for how they will perceive a self-study in which all the objectives in General Education have not been assessed.
- The same may apply for program assessment more broadly via UARC. Again, a conversation between the university and NWCCU could be instructive.

Other observations:

- A handful of courses do not have an assessment plan and in the first cycle the returns were spotty. The university will want to 1) ensure that all courses and programs have assessment plans as soon as feasible and 2) that compliance with data collection and returns is regularized and comprehensive.
- Resources for assessment software and an assessment coordinator need to be identified. It is also important that members of the university community understand that the addition of software and a coordinator will not resolve all issues related to assessment and that others will need to continue to be involved in the process.

- The two examples of closing the loop are not especially strong:

The Pharmacy program example seemed really shaped as a professional accreditation report and after meeting with the Dean and Associate Dean our opinion did not change. Clearly the data in that report would be useful for assessment, but the “closing the loop” is not evident.

The program review of the Paralegal program showed strengths and weaknesses of the program but there is no evidence providing showing that these data were used to make any changes to the program.

In both cases, the “closing the loop” narrative will be stronger when they can show what specific actions were taken as a result of these assessments and how those actions impacted the programs.

Overall, during our conversations with faculty and administrators we found anecdotal evidence of closing the loop, but nothing systematized or fully vested. It is completely possible for the university to be there by the seven-year self-study, but the work will have to be steadfast and unrelenting.

Nonacademic unit assessment seems even more in jeopardy of raising the interest of the seven-year team and the NWCCU. By the time of the next seven-year visit, only Student Affairs, Finance, and Human Relations. Still to be completed will be Facilities and ITS, Library, Advancement, Research, Legal Counsel and Safety, and Athletics, the latter not completed until February 2024. Again, perhaps a conversation between the NWCCU and the university will aid in clarifying how NWCCU will respond to that schedule.

Conclusion

We believe there is a collective commitment at ISU to build upon the solid framework it has developed in recent years through implementation of a strong and focused strategic plan with relevant core themes, a robust framework for evaluating mission fulfillment and its component building blocks including established thresholds for successful mission fulfillment, a well-designed framework for comprehensive, inclusive, transparent planning and a growing momentum related to comprehensive assessment across academic units. With the President Vailas retiring in 2018 and a new presidential search underway, it will be important, especially for the executive leadership, to maintain the institution’s brisk pace as it prepares for the next Seven Year Accreditation visit.

Still to be fully implemented are assessment cycles for most nonacademic units and clear identification of resources to support mission fulfillment. As such, we encourage ISU to consider the following: 1) touch base with NWCCU to discuss progress towards the comprehensive assessment of academic and nonacademic units recognizing the aforementioned concerns of having a comprehensive assessment cycles (academic and nonacademic) completed before the next team visit; 2) to use the IEAC and its relevant subcommittees to identify the resources needed for mission fulfillment and support the essential conversations about resource development and reallocation that would naturally follow.