

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

Year Seven Peer Evaluation Report

**Idaho State University
Pocatello, ID**

October 20-22, 2014

A Confidential Report Prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities that
Represents the Views of the Evaluation Committee

EVALUATION COMMITTEE REPORT

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EVALUATION COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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Idaho State University Evaluation Report

INTRODUCTION

On October 20-22, 2014 an eight-member Evaluation Committee representing the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) visited Idaho State University (ISU) in Pocatello, Idaho to assess the University's Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. Committee members arrived on campus having read the institution's self evaluation document and they participated in an introductory meeting at which initial impressions were shared and topics for further investigation were identified. Over the next two days committee members examined exhibits and supporting documents; conducted numerous individual interviews; and participated in several meetings with faculty, staff, students, and administrators. This report contains the findings that resulted from that intensive and thorough examination of the university.

The Committee extends deep appreciation for the hospitality shown by the university community before and during the visit. The university personnel responsible for preparations and logistics made certain that the committee had all the support and access to information necessary for the completion of its work, and members of the campus community warmly welcomed the committee and assisted it with its work.

Institutional History

Idaho State University was founded in 1901 as the Academy of Idaho, offering college preparatory and industrial courses. Through the years it has gone through several changes of name and mission. The institution achieved four-year status in 1927 as the University of Idaho—Southern Branch and became Idaho State University in 1947. Today it is classified as a Carnegie Research University High (RU/H), and it serves approximately 15,000 students at its main campus in Pocatello and additional campuses in Meridian, Idaho Falls, and Twin Falls.

Recent Accreditation History

ISU's last comprehensive evaluation took place in 2004. Its most recent evaluation was a Year One Evaluation conducted in Fall 2011, resulting in reaffirmation of accreditation with two Recommendations. In 2012 ISU was informed that Year Three and Year Five Reports would not be required and that the Fall 2014 Year Seven Report would be expanded to include all Standards.

Responses to Recommendations in Year One Peer Evaluation Report (Fall 2011)

Recommendation 1: *The institution should revisit the core themes and connect them more directly to the mission. Core themes indirectly relate to the mission and community engagement does not flow from the mission statement.*

Following an iterative process between ISU and the State Board of Education, at an official meeting in February 2012 the Board approved both a new mission statement and core themes for the institution. While the core themes do not encompass all aspects of the mission statement, they are directly related to it.

Recommendation 2: The institution should articulate the acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment for all identified indicators in the Standard One report.

Since the preparation of the Year One Evaluators' Report, there have been changes in the core themes and relevant indicators. The institution still assesses mission fulfillment through assessment of core themes. Benchmarks have been assigned to about 50% of the core theme indicators; about 20% of the core theme indicators are qualitative and have no benchmarks; the remaining of 30% of core theme indicators have benchmarks that are either unclear or are in development.

Eligibility Requirements

The evaluation committee found that ISU practices are consistent with NWCCU Eligibility Requirements.

Self Evaluation

The evaluation committee found the institution's self evaluation report to be well written and well organized. The text of the Self-Evaluation Report, appendices (provided as part of the electronic version of the Report), and links from the electronic version of the Report gave the evaluation committee ready access to a large body of information and statistics. However, the report also has some significant shortcomings. The length of the document and the sheer volume of information were problematic, but the major challenge for the committee was that the report is a descriptive rather than an analytical document. For example, core themes are presented along with objectives and indicators. However, assignment of benchmarks is incomplete and there is little or no information on the process by which overall performance related to each core theme is evaluated or on actions taken to improve the institution based on core theme assessments. Although challenges and accomplishments are noted, there is little in the way of identification of areas of institutional deficiencies or excellence. As a result, the evaluation team struggled with its own assessment of institutional strengths and weaknesses.

Standard One—Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

1.A Mission

The Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report states the current mission as:

The Mission of Idaho State University is to advance scholarly and creative endeavors through the creation of new knowledge, cutting-edge research, innovative artistic pursuits and high-quality academic instruction; to use these achievements to enhance technical, undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, health care services, and other services provided to the people of Idaho and the Nation; and to develop citizens who will learn from the past, think critically about the present, and provide leadership to enrich the future in a diverse, global society.

Idaho State University is a public research institution which serves a diverse population through its broad educational programming and basic, translational, and clinical research. Idaho State University serves and engages its communities with health care clinics and services, professional technical training, early college opportunities, and economic development activities. The University provides leadership in the health professions and related biomedical and pharmaceutical sciences, as well as serving the region and the nation through its environmental science and energy programs.

This statement of mission and the institution's core themes were approved by the State Board of Board of Education (SBOE) on Feb 15, 2012. The stated purpose of the institution is appropriate for an institution of public higher education. It is being used to provide direction for the development of core themes and strategic planning. The four core themes (learning and discovery, access and opportunity, leadership in the health sciences, and community engagement and impact) are aligned with the mission, but they do not encompass sufficient breadth so that mission fulfillment can be fully assessed. For example: there was no core theme that considered, or evidence in the report to indicate, an assessment of the degree to which students have developed or will develop skills to "learn from the past, think critically about the present, and provide leadership to enrich the future in a diverse, global society." Similarly, the core theme on community engagement and impact, outside of healthcare, does not flow seamlessly from the mission.

Members of the university community are aware of the statement of mission and if not an active participant in its development, can articulate that it has been expanded to explicitly include the health professions. As part of the ongoing accreditation process, the university's mission is being used as a more central document for the institution's planning and decision-making.

A former version of the institution's mission appears on the President's page of the ISU website. The institution needs to ensure that the most up-to-date statement of mission is published on its website.

ISU's definition of mission fulfillment is predicated on the accomplishments related to its core themes. However, there is no defined threshold as to what constitutes acceptable achievement of the mission or of the core themes.

The institution has demonstrated that it has a wealth of metrics and data. It is tracking these metrics where they have been identified. An implementation of the Banner Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in 2010 has improved the ability of the institution to access relevant data, but the institution has a limited ability to recover data prior to 2010. A program viability data system supports strategic and core theme planning and budget decisions. A state-mandated Program Prioritization process provided both qualitative and quantitative data at the program and campus level related to the core themes. There are still many indicators where benchmark data have just recently been, or soon will be, defined. The incomplete set of established targets for indicators hampers assessment of whether the institution has a robust planning process that is strategic. Despite the wealth of data, there was little analysis or interpretation of the data included in the Year Seven Report, making it difficult for the evaluation team to determine the extent of mission fulfillment.

1.B Core Themes

Idaho State University has identified four Core Themes:

Core Theme One: Learning and Discovery. Idaho State University promotes an environment that supports learning and discovery through the many synergies that can exist among teaching, learning, and scholarly activity.

Core Theme Two: Access and Opportunity. Idaho State University provides opportunities for students with a broad range of educational preparation and backgrounds to enter the University and climb the curricular ladder so that they may reach their intellectual potential and achieve their goals and objectives.

Core Theme Three: Leadership in the Health Sciences. Idaho State University values its established leadership in the health sciences with primary emphasis in the health professions. We offer a broad spectrum of undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate training. We deliver health-related services and patient care throughout the state in its clinics and postgraduate residency training sites. We are committed to meeting the health professions workforce needs in Idaho. We support professional development, continuing education, and telehealth services. We are active in Health Sciences research.

Core Theme Four: Community Engagement and Impact. Idaho State University, including its outreach campuses and centers, is an integral component of the local communities, the state and intermountain region. It benefits the economic health, business development, environment, and culture in the communities it serves.

These four themes were developed in 2010 by a Steering Committee and were approved by the State Board of Education (SBOE) in February 2012. In early 2013 the core themes were

integrated into the strategic plan, with indicators being crafted for each. In Academic Year 2013-2014 the university conducted systematic Program Prioritization, which incorporated linkages between the academic programs and the core themes. Additional indicators were established for the core themes in 2014 with ongoing development of benchmarks in conjunction with the rolling strategic plan. The themes and objectives were opened for comment by the campus community in February 2011, but their continued development seems to have been generally the purview of the Accreditation Steering Committee. Faculty input into the development of the core themes is not easy to determine; but based on information gathered from interviews conducted by evaluation committee members during the site visit, it appears that faculty participation in the development process has been sporadic. This seems to have led to some confusion on the part of faculty about their role in establishment of the indicators and benchmarks. Both the slow progress in developing core themes with a complete set of objectives, indicators, and benchmarks and the limited faculty attention to the process are undoubtedly related to the internal stress ISU has experienced over the last several years. During this period the institution has faced financial challenges, has completed a State Board of Education-mandated Program Prioritization process in a compressed timeline, and has undergone a reorganization of academic colleges.

It is clear that the first two core themes are rather broad and generic, reflecting the portion of the ISU mission statement related to the creation and advancement of knowledge in both education and research. This dual commitment is consistent with the institution's Carnegie classification as a Research University High (RU/H), a status achieved over the past several years.

Core Theme Two addresses what seems to be a large variation in the preparation and background of entering students. The objectives—educational ladder, student support services, and a broad range of opportunities for student involvement—cover the spectrum of access and opportunity, and generally there are good sets of indicators associated with each objective. There are, however, some aspects of Core Theme Two objectives and indicators that may warrant a re-examination. The term “educational ladder” for Objective 2.1 implies a coordinated or integrated set of steps leading from one educational level to another rather than simply an array of degree programs at levels ranging from certificates to PhD.s. If the objective is to provide a clear educational ladder, then indicators related to coordination and integration of degree programs at different levels would seem to be appropriate. Another instance that may warrant further consideration is the absence of “quality” or “student satisfaction” indicators related to objectives 2.2 and 2.3.

Core Theme Three acknowledges the historical stature of the health sciences within ISU for several decades, originating with a Board of Education mission in the 1980s. Growth over time from 8 to 20 programs in response to statewide needs has resulted in a robust and vibrant division, which although integrated into the infrastructure of the university's programs, nonetheless has a broader constituency.

Core Theme Four embodies both Community Engagement and Economic and Social Impact. The two aspects of this theme do have points in common; and, as exemplified by several of the indicators, both overlap with Core Theme Three. Assessment of this core theme—especially Objective 4.2 --may prove to be difficult because of the abundance of indicators that simply call for examples of some kind of activity

Standard Two—Resources and Capacity

2.A Governance

ISU has a governance system headed by the governing board, in this case the State Board of Education, and a president. The Board has the ultimate authority and responsibility for the institution but has delegated to the Chief Executive Officer (President) “full power and responsibility within the framework of the Board’s governing policies and procedures for the organization, management, and supervision of the institution” (*Idaho State Board of Education Governing Policies and Procedures*). The faculty governance organization or other representative organizations established or recognized by the President are given a role of “making recommendations to the Chief Executive Officer as part of the decision-making process of the institution” (*ibid.*).

While this governance structure is clearly defined, the advisory (as opposed to policy-making) role of the ISU Faculty Senate has been a source of confusion and tension. From April 2010 to October 2012, in order to clearly establish the advisory role of the Faculty Senate, the Board dissolved the Faculty Senate, established a provisional faculty senate, and subsequently oversaw the election of a new permanent Faculty Senate. Re-establishing the Faculty Senate with restrictions on eligibility for service and the restructuring of reporting lines for some councils created a tense, confrontational environment. The institution was also experiencing additional stress—a more difficult financial climate, an increased emphasis on research, further organizational change, and taking action on decisions necessary to make the changes and cope with the associated challenges.

During their time on campus, members of the evaluation team encountered individuals who ranged from those who are outspoken and strident in offering their opinions about mistakes of the past and serious problems with the present situation to those who are cautiously optimistic that things are changing for the better. Based upon the numerous comments offered by a broad range of members of the ISU community during the evaluation visit, the evaluation committee believes that the present environment is not meeting its potential for meaningful dialog, thus hindering the efficient operation of governance at the institution.

However, Faculty Senate leaders, in conversations with evaluation committee members, recognized and accepted that the Senate has an advisory rather than decision-making role in governance, indicated that “the needle has significantly moved off zero” with respect to trust in the administration, and acknowledged that communication with administrators is improving. Furthermore, the evaluation committee was impressed with the near universal, genuine concern of members of the ISU community for the welfare of students and their success. This admirable, shared commitment to the students can be a rallying point for the creation of a more positive working environment for all ISU employees.

The governing board of ISU, the State Board of Education (SBOE), is constituted and operates in a manner consistent with NWCCU standards. One challenge facing the SBOE is that it has

responsibility for K-12 as well as public higher education in Idaho. In discussions with members of the evaluation committee, the representatives of the board (President and two other members) indicated that they spend a bit over half their time on higher education. From the discussions it was obvious that the board members are well informed about ISU issues, clearly understand their responsibilities, and are fully engaged in the governance of the institution.

The institution has an appropriate set of qualified administrators. Recently, there has been significant turnover in the leadership of ISU; the Self-Evaluation Report lists 20 leadership posts which have been filled in the period 2012-2014. Thus, the institution has challenges with a nascent leadership as well as its restructuring of governance and financial concerns.

ISU clearly communicates its policies to students, faculty and administrators. The information about academic policies is readily available and communicated in a clear manner. Information supplied by Human Resources as well as interviews with college deans confirm the general finding that detailed policies and procedures pertaining to workload, personnel, research practices, and so forth are available and up-to-date. Policies governing students are published in catalogs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. They are available on a website and contain current information about policies and procedures. Likewise, the library policies are clearly defined and published for students, faculty and administrators. Findings from interviews with staff, students and faculty confirm the information about communication of policies contained in the self-evaluation.

All of the information supplied by the Office of the Registrar on the website and in face-to-face interviews shows that Idaho State University handles a variety of transfer students and transfer of credit situations in a consistent and fair manner. The consistency and efficiency in this area is clearly a strong point of ISU's governance procedures. The guidelines are readily accessible and communicated from the Office of Admissions and the Office of the Registrar. Articulation agreements at the university level seem to be functioning well and allow for mobility of students. These findings (including policies covering transfer of credit, academic standing, and petition/appeal policies for students) were supported with information gained in student interviews as well as faculty from several departments and programs.

ISU publishes its student admission policy in which it specifies the characteristics and qualifications appropriate for admission to its programs. The university demonstrates that it adheres to its admissions procedures and practices.

ISU publishes a catalog and maintains a website with current and accurate information regarding: its mission and core themes; admission requirements and procedures; grading policy; information on academic programs and courses; names, titles and academic credentials of administrators and faculty; rules and regulations for student conduct; rights and responsibilities of students; tuition, fees, and other program costs; refund policies and procedures; opportunities and requirements for financial aid; and the academic calendar.

ISU maintains and regularly reviews its human resource policies. Employees are provided with position descriptions and made aware of the conditions of their appointments. Faculty and

staff are made aware of performance review processes and the criteria for retention, promotion and tenure. ISU maintains secure human resource records and has appropriate policies to ensure the confidentiality of those records.

Evidence with regard to institutional integrity--including ethical standards, intellectual property, conflicts of interest, and academic freedom--reveal that ISU's Self-Evaluation Report and web resources are accurate portrayals of the institution. The definitions and policies around each of these areas are clearly stated, and additional resources and details are available in the ISU Policies and Procedures and ISU Student Handbook. As with other areas, the printed and electronic catalogs contain policies, procedures and timelines for appeals and grievance procedures. The findings of the site visit are consistent with the stated philosophy of academic freedom. Interviews with faculty and other constituencies indicated that there is a general feeling that faculty research, teaching, and student learning are operating under the necessary protections to advance inquiry and knowledge. Overall the site visit findings corroborated the statements in the Self-Evaluation Report.

The institution provides evidence that it adopts and maintains clearly defined, SBOE-approved policies which provide oversight and management of its financial resources to include financial planning as well as management and oversight of operating and capital budgets, reserves, investments, fundraising activities, cash management, transactions between fund accounts, and debt service.

2.B Human Resources

Though ISU has faced financial challenges, the institution appears to have sufficient human resources to effectively accomplish its mission and core themes and to fulfill its program goals. However, there have been shifts in staffing. According to data ISU provided the evaluation committee, it appears that faculty levels have declined slightly over the last four years, while the number of non-teaching staff has increased over the same time period.

Position descriptions account for the roles and responsibilities specified for individual employees. Position announcements provide prospective applicants with information on necessary qualifications and application procedures.

ISU recruits faculty nationally and requires credentials appropriate to the academic program and discipline. The faculty hiring and review processes provide a means by which faculty are sufficiently evaluated to ensure they have the necessary credentials and performance to meet the university's standards, with faculty of the appointing academic unit playing a major role in the appointment process.

ISU utilizes a formula that full-time faculty on nine-month contracts are assigned fifteen workload equivalency units per semester; part-time faculty and those on other contract arrangements are assigned on a proportional basis. Faculty workload agreements are documented in the faculty member's Annual Faculty Evaluation report. During the evaluation process each faculty member receives an individualized work assignment for the upcoming

year, including research, scholarship, creative activity and service. The university encourages colleges, departments and academic units to be flexible in balancing the many responsibilities placed on faculty. Additionally, performance evaluations for staff and administrators are conducted on an annual basis. The Board reviews the President annually.

Employees of all types have ample access to policies and procedures and other important resources, such as information regarding professional development and leadership development. The University's Leadership Development Program, designed to enhance emerging and experienced leaders, was cited as a particularly positive experience for campus professionals. Professional Development offerings are comprehensive and show attentiveness to the skill development needs at all levels of the university. ISU reviews its human resources policies in a deliberate manner and revises policies and procedures as necessary. Because of budget reductions and restrictions on travel, a number of staff have not had the opportunity to attend a professional conference for several years.

ISU takes specific steps to insure personnel processes are followed. For example, it provides explicit guidance on its website to individuals or committees conducting searches when openings occur. Representatives of the Human Resources Office and the Office of Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action and Diversity meet with all search committees to provide orientation and instruction on conducting effective searches. Confidentiality measures are in place for HR records.

2.C Education Resources

The educational programs and infrastructure of ISU allow the institution to offer a broad spectrum of academic programs to students in five different colleges as well as health sciences programs. There is sufficient evidence of structured and systematic review processes to assure the quality and rigor of program offerings. Documentation from the Undergraduate Curriculum Council and the Graduate Council reveals a clearly defined vetting mechanism for curriculum changes that is designed to assure quality is maintained when catalog changes are proposed. Additional evidence of rigorous program and course review processes and policies was also embedded in the materials detailing the review plan, guidelines, and schedule associated with cycles of program review. The Self-Evaluation Report along with additional published materials from the Office of Academic Affairs outlined clear processes for faculty who are charged with the primary responsibility of developing course objectives and outcomes.

The expected course and program outcomes are published and are provided to students in written form. Learning goals and program objectives are featured prominently on the vast majority of individual program and department websites. An examination of a variety of programs and departments at this institution shows this to be a strength of Idaho State University.

Additional findings from an analysis of program and department websites show that learning goals and outcomes are specified at department, program/major, and course levels. Some departments feature outcome 'maps' or grids that link specific outcomes with components of

the major. Overall the evidence from the Self-Evaluation Report, website and printed documents shows a consistent and sustained commitment to offer programs and curricula that are based on learning outcomes. The content of the outcomes appear to be appropriate and discipline-specific.

Another important element of the educational resources is in the area of library and information resources, specifically, the way in which faculty partner with library instructional personnel to integrate these resources into classrooms and student learning. The library facilities and information resources at this institution seem to be facing significant and chronic resource challenges that strain the ability to effectively support instructional as well as research activities. If not addressed adequately, this situation has the potential for a significant and negative long term impact on learning, scholarship and ultimately mission fulfillment.

This situation impacts both teaching and scholarship across many areas of Idaho State University. In the General Education objectives, information literacy (Objective 8) details learning goals that highlight the importance of library and information resources. While there is evidence that courses and sessions related to information literacy are available to students and faculty, evidence of its direct assessment is largely absent. Findings from interviews and additional documents gathered during the site visit indicate that this deficiency can be ultimately linked to the lack of resources available to this area of the university.

Overall, the summary and presentation of library and information resources in the Self-Evaluation Report are incongruent with many of the findings of this site visit. The staff and resources in this area seem overextended. Many faculty articulated the need for additional resources in this area to be able to stay current on scholarship in their respective disciplines. There also seems to be a general frustration and sentiment that this area will continue to be resource poor. There is, however, a genuine commitment to the students and faculty. And there is a sincere effort on the part of library faculty and staff to do everything they can with limited resources. They are doing a fine job of reaching out to faculty to offer custom workshops for classes.

Idaho State University requires a General Education component as an important dimension of its undergraduate programs. The recently revised curriculum is designed to support breadth and depth of intellect and is published in the undergraduate catalog. The catalog and supporting documents supplied during this visit show nine core objective areas. The goals for each objective are highlighted in the documents supplied to the committee. The goals and objectives for each of the nine core areas are readily accessible. The design of the core of general education does contain a potential gap in that the Self-Study Report notes that Objective 7 (critical thinking) and objective 8 (information literacy) are optional depending on the selection made by the student. If critical thinking/information literacy is optional, this presents an alignment problem with the stated mission and values statements found in other institutional documents. Additionally, the resource shortages noted above in the library and information resources area present potential barriers to delivering the goals and skills associated with Objective 8 (Information Literacy) in the General Education program.

2.D Student Support Resources

Idaho State University approaches its relationships with and education of students from the perspective of providing a positive educational environment that promotes student success within a diverse student body. Among the University's student access and success efforts are: ensuring access and support for historically-underrepresented students; offering a range of means for participating in educational experiences, including on-line program offerings; extensive academic support offerings; career development supports; and supporting students in their transition into and out of the university. Student support personnel and faculty demonstrate a high level of dedication to their positions; across the institution there is a strong culture of commitment to student support and success among faculty and staff.

Policies, procedures and programs are designed to be in alignment with the institution's mission. Campus regulations are widely and clearly communicated in a variety of formats. ISU has a well-developed emergency preparedness system, including a campus alert system to notify the campus in the event of a range of emergency situations. In addition, a variety of safety trainings are provided to campus community members. The University enjoys a positive collaborative relationship with the Pocatello Police Department.

Students are provided with clear and accessible information regarding their rights and responsibilities. Federal crime reporting and data management is performed as required and statistics are available on the University website and in campus publications. ISU should give attention to the further development of its comprehensive Title IX plan, ensuring that its details are consistent with U. S. Department of Education guidelines.

ISU clearly communicates its admissions criteria. Students admitted into particular programs are provided with appropriate advising and support services, in direct response to the unique skills and educational background of the in-coming student. The university may want to look closely at its efforts to provide support for students categorized as at-risk to ensure that outreach and interventions are targeted to those students needing the greatest support in transitioning to and navigating through the institution.

New student orientation is mandatory for all first-time students. All new students must complete face-to-face or online orientation and academic advising prior to their first term of enrollment. The catalog offers clear information on admissions criteria. Graduation and academic progress standards are published. The Graduate School provides online orientation for graduate students.

ISU has a published policy and process to consider program elimination and a policy that will enable student completion of program requirements in the event of program or course elimination. The first option for program completion involves supporting students in transferring to a comparable program at an in-state university. The University's recent history with program elimination provides evidence that the policy is viable and has worked when it has been enacted. Students who have been affected by program elimination have been supported in working out individual completion plans.

ISU makes available in print and on-line for all interested parties information on its mission and core themes, entrance requirements, grading procedures, the academic calendar, faculty and administrator titles and academic qualifications, academic program information and other information pertaining to the cost of attendance, financial aid and refund policies.

ISU publishes its catalog annually. The catalog provides students with essential information on policies, procedures, academic program requirements, rights and responsibilities, and course offerings. The catalog provides specific information on professional or degree programs requiring particular credentialing, or certification. Detailed information is provided for each graduate program, identifying licensure requirements and employment opportunities.

The institution has a very detailed Protection of Sensitive Data policy governing the administration, access to, usage, maintenance and security of student data. University employees are provided with detailed information on complying with FERPA. Student records are maintained and backed up on secure systems. ISU students are provided with information regarding institutional policies on the release of records. The university has stringent guidelines on access to and release of student records. However, lack of staffing support has created particular stress on the resources and capacity of the Registrar's Office to manage its broad range of responsibilities that include records management, technology and other infrastructure supports.

Student financial aid policies are clearly communicated, as is information on types of financial aid provided by Idaho State University. The University provides information on-line to assist students in estimating the cost of attendance.

All students receiving and accepting student loans for the first time are provided with entrance loan counseling. Any student graduating, terminating their studies or withdrawing from the University must complete a student loan exit interview. Student loan default rates are regularly monitored and published.

All ISU students have access to advising from Central Academic Advising. Students at outreach centers have access to full-time academic advisors located at each outreach site. University academic advisors have appropriate professional preparation and training and are well qualified to execute the responsibilities of their roles and advance ISU's mission. The institution has campus-specific mechanisms to ensure on-going training for advisors and conducts ongoing surveys to evaluate its advising system through its ISU Cares Survey. While all students have access to academic advising, there appears to be little coordination to ensure that students beyond the initial first year are receiving appropriate advising. The University may want to clarify who is responsible for advising students at various stages of their academic career.

ISU offers a rich and diverse array of extra-curricular activities for students, including more than 160 clubs and organizations. The University administration works closely with student leaders to support a dynamic co-curricular experience at ISU. The Division of Student Affairs regularly assesses various aspects of the student experience and works collaboratively with students to implement changes.

Auxiliary programs are closely aligned with ISU's educational and co-curricular programs. Faculty, staff and students have sufficient input on services and programs. Auxiliary programs are seen as integral components of efforts to build a strong ISU community.

ISU sponsors 15 intercollegiate sports at the Division I (FCS) level. Student athletes must meet the same academic admission standards as other students. In cases where athletes do not meet the established admissions standards, a committee to assess students with extraordinary talents reviews their applications. The Department of Athletics is administered in a manner consistent with University policies and procedures and has the necessary administrative oversight to ensure its alignment with institutional mission and values.

The university has a well-established and executed policy for protecting the privacy and verifying the identity of on-line and distance students. The university process allows the on-line student various option for taking proctored of exams in settings that verify the student's identity. Institutional policies that protect student identity while also ensuring academic integrity are clearly articulated.

2.E Library and Information Resources

The ISU Library provides staff, collections, digital assets, and access points that support the institution's mission and core themes and meet the basic instructional and research needs of the university, utilizing creative and often entrepreneurial tactics to mitigate, as greatly as possible, the budgetary and staff constraints they face. It is unclear how the library will be able to support the enhanced research emphasis for ISU without a significant influx of funding for both staffing and collections. It also is apparent that the aging Eli M. Oboler Library has become so worn that its environment is neither consistent with the quality of the facility's staff nor responsive to the study and collaboration space needed by students; equipment is outdated and worn, furniture and amenities are inadequate and uninviting, and the HVAC is, at best, underpowered and unreliable.

The University Library Committee, a representative body of elected faculty and students is an active advisory partner with the library administration in planning for the continued development of library and information services that most effectively meet the needs of ISU's students, faculty, and staff. The Dean's reporting line to the Provost as well as its representation on bodies that deal with curricular and program changes and approvals also informs planning.

The ISU Library offers an array of credit courses, collaborative instructional sessions with classroom faculty, workshops, web-based instruction, orientations, tutorials, and other formal and Informal instructional activity for all categories of users.

While the ISU Library does conduct ongoing evaluation of its resources and services, much of the data has not been analyzed deeply and little is directed specifically to the assessment of student learning outcomes. The senior library administration is working to develop a culture of assessment that will make the process more formal and systematic, addressing a shortcoming

that is widely evident on the ISU campus. The ISU Library has administered a standard gap-analysis survey tool, LibQual, on a triennial basis and there is demonstrated evidence that the results have been used to inform planning and budget requests. For example, the Spring 2014 LibQual survey demonstrated needs in physical facilities, resources, and services/hours. As is stated in the *Self-Evaluation Report*, "The Library is developing a comprehensive approach and plans for these various challenges and will fix them as fast as resources become available."

2.F Financial Resources

ISU demonstrates financial stability for long and short-term solvency by maintaining adequate cash reserves and a stable bond rating as provided by the bond rating agencies, Moody's and Standard and Poor's. Through annual third-party financial audits of revenue and expense statements as well as existence of proper financial controls, and with appropriate oversight by the SBOE Audit Committee, ISU's systems of controls are designed to provide due diligence in managing financial risks associated with its short and long-term liabilities.

ISU reports that it has experienced declining State appropriations over the past few years. While ISU has shifted more of its costs to students through the addition of tuition and fees, ISU reports that it maintains a favorable position among its peers with regard to academic affordability. ISU credits its ability to offset some of the financial burden on students through grants, contributions, and sound fiscal management. Additionally, ISU has made a strategic investment with its purchase of the 209,000 square foot RISE facility. The building, which will specialize in innovations in science and engineering, has the potential to produce positive revenues for the institution.

From FY08 to FY13, ISU increased its cash reserves from only \$205K to over \$26M. ISU has surpassed the minimum reserve target of the State Board of Education. In the most current update for fall of 2014, it has achieved optimal reserves of 60 days of working capital. ISU is complimented for improving short-term solvency through its impressive gains in cash reserves while maintaining a favorable position of student affordability among its peers. However, in numerous meetings attended by evaluation committee members, comments were received about sacrifices in operating budget and holds placed on position openings during the reserve growth period noted in the *Self-Evaluation Report*. There is some evidence that a general lack of understanding among mid-level management exists regarding the financial priorities of the institution and how that relates to sacrifices made by their units. Likewise, there appears to be some misunderstanding whether budget cuts and holds placed on open positions are a temporary measure or a permanent change. The evaluation committee was informed by the Vice President of Finance and Administration (VPFA) that due to excellent budget performance in the current fiscal year, the division expects to return surplus funding to all departments this year. This will consist of a \$2.1M giveback to the academic side of the house.

ISU reports that it maintains an iterative and inclusive budgeting process that utilizes a Special Budget Consultation Committee (SBCC). The SBCC reviews and advises senior administrators on the budget requests of each individual university unit. Institutional units are provided budgeting parameters by the office of the VPFA that together with the unit business officers

and departmental administrators are used to guide the budgeting process. The advisory committee prepares budget recommendations that are reviewed, modified as needed, and ultimately approved by the Vice Presidents and President.

The SBCC is appointed by the VPFA and is a very diverse group that includes three faculty members, two representatives from the ISU Staff Council, three student leaders, one senior staff member from Academic affairs, two University Business Officers, and the appointing VP. In response to questions, the evaluation committee was informed that the SBCC committee is briefed by the VPFA on institutional goals and objectives. In discussions with several mid-level administrators, including two who are not directly a part of the division of Finance and Administration, there was general agreement that the members of the SBCC feel that they provide a valuable and viable advisory function to the University administrators charged with the task of establishing final budgets.

ISU manages its financial resources by utilizing a “university business service model.” Under this business model, individual university business officers (UBOs) from all institutional units report to the VPFA. Accordingly, ISU indicates that the process results in greater budgeting continuity that can be better aligned with overall university goals and objectives. The evaluation committee asked how departments that may have traditionally had their own autonomous financial officers relate to the business service model, and how the VPFA deals with problems that might occur due to the disassociation of these responsibilities from a particular business unit. The VPFA indicates that he meets quarterly with heads of divisions with assigned UBO’s to provide updates on budget performance, answer questions, and solve problems which may have occurred. The VPFA also indicates that there is an emphasis on customer service by the UBOs to the departments that they serve. In discussion with two department heads outside of the division of Finance and Administration, there was general satisfaction expressed for the transparency and service received through the business service model.

ISU reports that it maintains its accounting practices and principals to be in accordance with GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) and GASB (Government Accounting Standards Board). ISU manages a relatively new and comprehensive financial reporting system via industry recognized computer software that replaced an older “home-grown” system. A major university initiative to install this system between 2007 and 2012 has seen the successful implementation of a set of core modules including Finance, Human Resources, Student Enrollment, Travel Expense Management, and Financial Aid. Other milestones achieved recently with the financial management system include online payment and cashiering, and applicant tracking and performance management. Full installation of the Enterprise Resource Planning system was accomplished on schedule and \$700K under budget.

Capital project planning is developed by Facilities Services in consultation with all primary department constituencies from the university community. Plan objectives are reviewed, modified as needed and ultimately approved annually by the University President. Requests for capital projects are submitted to the SBOE, where they are reviewed and prioritized for funding along with other higher education requests in the State. Approved capital projects for

education and general functions are primarily funded by the Idaho Division of Public Works, with oversight from the Public Building Fund Advisory Council.

In the three most recent fiscal years, ISU has received nearly \$7M from State resources, \$3.8M in donations for major capital projects and has also supplemented its capital programs with about \$1M in local institutional funding. Additionally, ISU has received a special \$3.75M State appropriation specifically for deferred maintenance. The evaluation committee has addressed deferred maintenance issues in greater detail under section 2.G within this report.

ISU notes that institutional debt service requirements are reviewed annually and that taking on any new debt requires approval by the SBOE. The institution reports that it has taken on no new long-term debt, that it has refinanced existing debt in order to save \$3.5M over the life of the debt issue, and that it continues to pay down existing debt. Debt service reduction in FY13 has resulted in \$4.6M less overall debt carried by the institution.

Except for intercollegiate athletics, ISU maintains well-defined separation in its relationship between general operations and auxiliary enterprises. As required by Board policy V.B.4.a, ISU auxiliaries are self-supporting entities whose operating costs are covered by charges and fees, as well as sales for goods and services that are provided. According to the Self-Evaluation Report, the Board, and not ISU, determines the maximum amount of State funding that may be allocated to intercollegiate athletics each year.

Per Board policy, ISU has financial audits conducted annually by external professionally qualified personnel. Results of the external audits, including recommendations and findings, are presented to the Board in December each year. There have been no material findings noted in the past three independent audit reports.

ISU's fund raising activities are found within the ISU Foundation, the Development Office, Alumni Association, and the ISU Marketing and Communications operation. The Foundation has a discreet written operating agreement with the university that has been approved by the Board. Compliance with policy and standards of ethical practices are accounted for through external audit reports, institutional oversight, and the operation of independent financial accounting systems.

ISU reports that to satisfy the goal of having a stronger entrepreneurial focus, the Foundation has engaged in the creation of limited liability corporations (LLCs). One such LLC that ISU indicates is very successful is the Bengal Pharmacy extension in Arco, Idaho. By utilizing pharmacy resources that are unique to ISU for serving the public at large, ISU has expanded its services regionally and served an even greater demand than was initially anticipated. ISU is complimented for its entrepreneurial focus to create diversified revenue streams such as the Bengal Pharmacy.

2.G Physical and Technological Infrastructure

As with many public institutions of higher education nationally, the ISU physical campus has a significant deferred maintenance and capital renewal liability. In a 2012 presentation given by the then Associate Vice President for Facilities ISU's deferred maintenance and capital renewal (DMCR) liability was estimated at \$444M. Through the completion of a comprehensive campus-wide facilities condition assessment, the amount of DMCR has been revised to \$352M. Similar to many other public institutions, one of ISU's challenges is to maintain buildings systems for facilities that were constructed in nearly every decade from the 1910s to the 2000s. Much of ISU's educational building space is of an older vintage, with only a few academic buildings less than ten years old.

ISU uses a rubric to prioritize project needs based on factors such as life safety, business continuity, code compliance, accreditation, and program growth. The rubric establishes higher priority ranking within the metrics to correspond with the seriousness of the issue being cited. For example, an issue that constitutes imminent threat to life would be ranked higher than a life safety issue that poses the possibility of a more minor personal injury. Each metric has a three-tier ranking from 1 through 3 to delineate severity (3 being most severe). The University also reports that it is given latitude to use the rubric as a guideline, while establishing its institutional priorities as needed.

ISU Facilities Services personnel indicate that there is generally a good understanding among the University community about the causes of deferred maintenance and the limited resources available to address this problem. ISU utilizes a special zone maintenance team that periodically goes through an entire facility to patch, paint, and correct cosmetic problems. Together with an emphasis on providing very good custodial services within the buildings, older buildings can be given a much better appearance overall. Based on a campus tour, the evaluation committee concluded that many facilities are well cared for in relation to the available or reasonably obtainable operating resources at ISU.

ISU uses no student fees to apply toward O&M or deferred maintenance. ISU self-reports that its O&M expenditures are on par with its Idaho counterparts and only slightly behind its national peers. Facilities Services uses online surveys tabbed to work requests to rate services performed on quality, professionalism, condition of completed work and overall client satisfaction. There is also an "ISU Cares" online program that solicits comments and suggestions on any aspect of university operations from the University community.

One particular building toured by two evaluation committee members that was found to be in extremely poor condition was the Oboler Library. While reviewing the 2016 Alterations and Repair Plan, Oboler Library is funded for five projects totaling approximately \$1.7M. Another request for major capital improvement from the State includes \$6M in HVAC upgrades for Oboler Library.

ISU began a major master planning initiative in 2012 using broad input from all segments of the university community. The ISU master planning consultant completed the final draft in October

2013. However, the master plan has yet to be approved or broadly distributed; and as of the evaluation committee's visit in October 2014 it remained in administrative review.

One major component of the master plan involves substantial growth of the Health Sciences district that includes addition of over 800,000 square feet of new academic and related space over the next twenty years. The evaluation committee asked the University why it has not formally approved the master plan and how this might impact attainment of Core Theme Three, Leadership in Health Sciences. The University representatives responded that ISU found itself in agreement with a SBOE opinion that formally adopting the draft 2013 Master Plan in such dire economic times would not be prudent. ISU is also reconsidering whether one element of the plan that calls for purchase of a closed hospital facility is a good financial decision. The Board apparently has indicated that if ISU continues to adhere to its ongoing fiscal discipline measures, it may ultimately be in a position to support the ISU master plan.

The evaluation committee has concerns for the uncertainty with future planning involving physical growth at ISU as it relates to Core Theme Three. The committee suggests that ISU clarify with the Board when and at what level the Board may be prepared to support the ISU master plan as part of the institution's response to Recommendation #3 in the evaluators' report.

Under the auspices of a Campus Safety Committee, ISU provides oversight for the safe use, storage, and disposal of hazardous and toxic materials. In addition to the information in the Self-Evaluation Report, the evaluation committee was presented with evidence that Material Data Safety Sheets are properly utilized and filed, that hazardous materials trainings are offered, and that health- and safety-related occupational training programs are regularly provided.

Campus security is handled by an in-house ISU security team that coordinates closely with the local City of Pocatello Police Department. The officers typically receive their academic training at ISU and many eventually take jobs with the Pocatello Police Department. Accordingly, ISU reports great synergy between ISU and city police. While the State of Idaho does not provide for universities to maintain official law enforcement departments, ISU recently achieved ICOFA certification for its security department. ISU reports that they are the first such department to achieve this certification. ISU is complimented for setting a standard for its department to proactively earn the ICOFA certification, although not required of them.

ISU has implemented many new robust IT security measures including data management zones, new IT staff positions, better security policies, security training, and the use of a consultant to assist with management of HIPPA privacy risks. ISU recently settled a major HIPPA complaint directed at ISU by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). While ISU reports that there is no evidence that private information was ever compromised, a brief breach in computer security led to the complaint. The settlement with the OCR resulted in many new security measures being implemented by ISU as well as significant new funding for division operations. The evaluation committee believes that the ongoing ISU response to the possible data breach has been as

proactive as its response was reactive in seeking solutions to substantial security risks encountered.

ISU adequately maintains technological infrastructure that is consistent with institutional core themes and mission that support university administrative and academic functions. The committee further finds that ISU IT operations staff members deliver appropriate instruction, training, and support for student, faculty and staff to facilitate appropriate and effective uses of ISU's comprehensive IT resources.

The ISU IT support staff meets biweekly to address operational issues while an IT Advisory Committee made up of key faculty and staff meet regularly to discuss ideas for systems improvement. Additionally, there is an eISU Steering Committee that makes budget decisions and implements recommendations made by the Advisory Committee. As a member of the President's Cabinet, the CIO is able to articulate issues that surface through the numerous networking and input meetings of the various advisory and implementation groups.

ISU reports that institutional support, student technology fees, and student approved lab fees provide adequate revenue to renew IT infrastructure on a three to five year cycle. In light of the rapid obsolescence of IT technology, systems planning does not typically extend beyond a five-year horizon.

Standard Three—Planning and Implementation

3.A Institutional Planning

ISU has a well developed strategic planning process that involves an appropriate broad-based constituency. The institution is required to create an annually updated strategic plan that is consistent with the SBOE strategic plan. To conform with this requirement the institution annually updates its strategic plan, originally created in 2009, through the efforts of a group that includes Academic Affairs leaders, the Vice Presidents, Deans, and the Accreditation Steering Committee. The institution is preparing for creation of a new strategic plan, with the kickoff scheduled for January 2015.

The strategic planning update process is coordinated with annual budget planning and development—a process that starts with guidelines issued by the Vice President for Finance and Administration, then requests from units and presentations by deans to the Special Budget Consultation Committee (which has broad representation appointed by the VPFA). The Special Budget Consultation Committee makes recommendations to the President, who consults with the President’s Cabinet, and makes a final budget request—informed both by the strategic plan and the results of the annual budgeting process—to the SBOE.

While the strategic planning process and the budgeting and budget planning processes are well coordinated, the relationships between other ISU plans and the strategic plan are less clear. There are a number of such plans at ISU that are relevant to comprehensive planning (e.g., Emergency Response Plan, Complete College Idaho Plan, and a Master Plan which has not been formally adopted). However, nowhere in the Self-Evaluation Report is there a description of how all these plans are considered in a comprehensive planning process.

While it is clear that “appropriately defined data...are analyzed and used” (Standard 3.A.3) to inform planning at ISU (e.g., Program Prioritization results are used in budget planning), the systematic links between assessment across the institution and planning are not clear. This situation seems particularly problematic given the incomplete status of assessment at ISU.

3.B Core Theme Planning

It is not clear that the institution has an all-encompassing and fully approved comprehensive plan, though a rolling strategic plan in which the core themes are centrally placed has been in place and is updated on an annual basis. Therefore, alignment of comprehensive core theme planning with the institution’s comprehensive planning process (as opposed to alignments with the strategic planning process) cannot be determined at this time, though some indicators and benchmarks have been established. The Self-Evaluation Report does not appear to address how this alignment is (or is to be) achieved.

The Self-Evaluation Report provides ample evidence that core theme and core theme objectives were an important criterion in the recent Program Prioritization process. However, core themes are more accurately characterized as one of the criteria for Program Prioritization

as opposed to serving as a guide to the process.

It is clear that the institution collects and analyzes well-defined data, particularly with respect to the numerical ratings part of the Program Prioritization process. How this data aligns with core theme planning is less clear, since the guidelines for this process and strategic planning appear to diverge at points. Nevertheless, there is evidence that data is used heavily to inform all these planning processes.

Assessment of the core theme metrics, however, is incomplete, particularly in portions of the Learning and Discovery theme (Core Theme One), which in turn affects its use in the planning process. For example, the General Education program is an integral part of this core theme, but the data necessary to evaluate achievement of this relatively new educational curriculum is not yet available. Much of the indicator/benchmark data for the core themes consists of raw numerical results (class sizes, graduates, etc.) that may need re-evaluation as “appropriately-defined data” (Standard 3.B.3). Moreover, the establishment of core theme benchmarks is an on-going process, with a number anticipated in early 2015.

A final note on the Self-Study Report for this Standard is that the narrative focuses on the history of the development of the core themes rather than addressing the three sections of Standard 3.B on how the data and themes correlate. This in turn complicated evaluation committee determination of how the planning process for the core themes integrates into the on-going comprehensive planning of the university.

Standard Four—Effectiveness and Improvement

4.A Assessment

The institution has developed a process to systematically collect and analyze meaningful and verifiable data related to many objectives and indicators of the core themes. In most cases, the data are appropriate for use as indicators of achievement.

However, there are some cases in which it is not clear that the indicators and related data provide a useful basis for evaluating the accomplishment of core themes. There are four types of questionable situations:

1. Indicators are not always directly aligned with objectives. One example is Indicator 1.2.4, “Number of comprehensive program reviews conducted each year,” as an indicator of program quality and relevance. While the content of the program reviews can be directly related to program quality and relevance, the number of reviews conducted each year seems unrelated. Similarly, Indicator 1.2.5, “number of undergraduate and graduate degrees awarded,” doesn’t seem very closely related to program quality and relevance.
2. Indicators and associated data are not always clear. For example, Indicator 1.2.2, “Examples of placement rates of graduates from academic and professional-technical programs,” is also another indicator of program quality and relevance. While the examples given demonstrate high placement rates, the quality implications of the rates would be clearer if the ISU placement rates were given in the context of national placement rates from similar programs. Another unclear point related to this indicator is that the indicator and associated table (Table 12) cite “placement rates” while the associated text in the Self-Evaluation Report cites “pass rates.”
3. In some cases it is not clear how a benchmark and associated data can be used for evaluation. Quite a few indicators start with “Examples of...” For example, Indicators 3.2.2 (“Examples of affiliation agreements) and 3.2.3 (“Examples of faculty volunteer hours in community screenings”) are indicators for Objective 3.2, “Delivery of patient care and related health services.” Clearly both indicators are relevant, but how can the associated lists of examples be assessed in evaluating performance? In fact, the text related to Indicator 3.2.3 in the Self-Evaluation Report contains actual numbers of faculty hours spent in these endeavors, implying that this indicator could easily be converted to a quantitative one that would be assessable. Similarly, Indicator 3.2.2 could be (or maybe already is) brought into convergence with the related goal in the ISU Strategic Plan.
4. In some cases, the indicators lack benchmarks or targets (e.g., Indicators 2.2.3 and the graduation rate portion of 2.2.4). Having clear targets would facilitate the focusing of resources on achievement and the assessment of mission fulfillment. Some initiatives

will have no benchmarks until spring 2015 and therefore have no baseline or target metrics.

Overall, the Self-Evaluation Report provided a good bit of data on indicators and some on benchmarks but lacked the analyses that should have resulted in evidence-based evaluations/assessment of the achievement of the core theme objectives and mission fulfillment.

Units within the Division of Student Affairs regularly assess the outcomes and effectiveness of specific co-curricular programs and services. Additionally, the Division conducts periodic comprehensive assessments to determine student perceptions of the student experience, which it benchmarks against comparable assessments at peer institutions.

Faculty, department heads and deans were heavily involved in Board-mandated academic and non-academic Program Prioritization (see below). Each college identified the bottom quintile of programs and developed action plans for these programs. At least some deans were using the results of the review to re-allocate resources from stagnant programs to new or growing programs. This is one example of an institutional process where meaningful institutional data are being used to evaluate programs with a goal of institutional improvement. The results of the program prioritization will feed into the development of an academic program plan.

The evaluation team confirmed that faculty are the primary source of input into academic program review, curriculum development and the curriculum approval process. There is a regular timeline for program review. The coordination of the processes for program assessment and program review have recently been centralized in the Provost's Office to provide consistency in compliance and outcomes and an institutional perspective.

All academic courses have clearly-identified student learning outcomes. Assessment of these outcomes in courses in professional programs is fairly routine. In its annual reviews of faculty the College of Education requires that each faculty member address one of the outcomes of one of his/her courses. Student learning outcome assessment in courses outside of professional programs is spotty.

Professional accreditation requires that academic programs conduct assessment to ensure that students meet program learning outcomes. At ISU, a significant proportion of the programs, and especially those programs that have professional accreditation, have an ongoing process of assessment of clear and measurable student learning outcomes. A review of a sample of programs that do not have professional accreditation revealed that all had clear program learning outcomes. A significant proportion (6/13) had assessment criteria that indirectly measured student learning (e.g., a completing a paper, making a presentation, an exhibition, completing a writing assignment, participating in an exit survey) rather than directly assessing student learning (e.g., pre- and post-instruction exams, embedded questions on an exam or scoring instrument, panel review of student work using a rubric). While most had a schedule for which outcomes would be evaluated in which order, none had specific dates for which outcomes would be evaluated when. Some plans had not been updated in about 10 years. In a

program review document, one unit indicated that while it had conducted annual assessment of its programs up until the institutional reorganization in 2009, it ceased doing so after that because the new dean did not request it. While programs with professional accreditation are closing the loop on assessment of learning outcomes, programs without such accreditation are not yet achieving that goal.

ISU revised its general education program in 2010/2011 and implemented a new program in 2013. The General Education Requirements Committee (GERC) developed student learning outcomes for each of the general education objectives <http://coursecat.isu.edu/undergraduate/academicinformation/generaleducation/>. Except for the possibility that students can opt out of critical thinking/information literacy as noted above and that one of the goals for spoken English is listed as being able to communicate effectively in standard written English, the objectives and goals are clear and relevant to general education.

Assessment of student learning outcomes for ISU's general education program has not been conducted. An assessment plan for the new general education program was to be developed in spring 2014 after all learning outcomes and rubrics were completed. Before the assessment plan was complete, the State Board of Education began a review of its statewide general education policy. Faculty from the eight public institutions participated in disciplinary groups (writing, speech, humanities/fine arts, sciences, math, and social sciences) to develop student learning outcomes and rubrics for their disciplines. The Board approved policy changes in late spring 2014 with an effective date of implementation of a new general education curriculum in fall 2015. To avoid having to review courses twice, ISU began reviewing all the general education courses in spring 2014. An assessment plan was drafted during summer 2014. This document was in review at the time of the site visit with an expected approval date in spring 2015 and implementation by fall 2015.

Many online courses are assessed in traditional ways. Faculty in several colleges participate in Quality Matters (peer based, continuous improvement in online education and student learning). Faculty who become credentialed in Quality Matters notice that the benefits of the training spill over into face-to-face offerings.

The ISU Self-Evaluation Report does not explicitly address NWCCU Standards 4.A.4, 4.A.5, and 4.A.6. Other than the current effort for the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report, the evaluation team could find no schedule for regular and comprehensive review of core theme objectives, planning, or assessment practices. The institution has many concurrent efforts and needs to complete them and integrate them in the future. The Office of Academic Affairs recently hired an associate vice provost for institutional effectiveness whose responsibility is to better integrate these efforts.

Although this evaluation report describes shortcomings in both ISU's assessment of core themes and the institution's presentation of its holistic, regular assessment processes, a rigorous process of assessment did occur as part of the Program Prioritization exercise. All academic and non-academic programs were included in the process. It was based on a national

(Dickeson) model and included the input of faculty and staff, institutional data, and customized sets of criteria.

The Board initiated a state-wide program prioritization process in May 2013. ISU suspended most of its existing assessment processes and began its implementation of Program Prioritization in Fall 2013. Program reports were submitted to the Office of the Provost in February 2014, and the results of the process—including 166 recommendations ranging from program elimination to modification/consolidation to enhancement—were incorporated into the FY2015 budget cycle. Ultimately, implementation of the action plans from Program Prioritization will be conducted in phases over a three-year period. While the assessment was not overtly outcomes-based, it did incorporate core themes, include all ISU programs and services, and led to actions intended to improve the institution.

4.B Improvement

ISU has aggressively pursued an impressive series of actions aimed at improving the institution. The examples provided in the Self-Evaluation Report are presented in a way that emphasizes their relationships to the core themes. In most cases, the presentation in the report also demonstrated how the decisions and actions are related to the institution's strategic plan, the Program Prioritization exercise, the Complete Idaho initiative, and/or academic program reviews.

At least for the most part, it is clear that the improvement-related decisions and actions fit within the priorities of the institution and are consistent with the goals and objectives of the various plans and exercises. However, it is less clear how many of the actions described in this section of the report are based on “the results of core theme assessments and results of assessments of programs and services” that employ “meaningful institutionally identified indicators of achievement” (Standard 4.VB.1). It is worth noting a few examples to illustrate the lack of consistency in the Self-Evaluation Report's presentation of the relationship between assessment processes and decisions/actions:

1. **Clear Relationship:** The Program Prioritization process, which the evaluation committee regards as an excellent example of an evidence-based process, resulted in decisions to “expand access and narrow the focus of the Meridian Health Science Center to health-related programs.” (Self-Evaluation Report, p. 282). It also appears that findings in the Program Prioritization Process prompted a review by a consultant that led to proposed revisions (currently under institutional review) to the Baccalaureate degree in Nursing.
2. **Deficient Description of Relationship:** The Complete College Idaho initiative has provided the impetus for transformation of academic remediation programs in mathematics and English (Self-Evaluation Report, p. 277). The report does not describe the relationship between the changes that have been implemented and assessment results, but during the on-site visit evaluators did learn about the way in which assessment results drove the changes.

3. No Relationship Described: A major change in the distribution of indirect cost revenues was implemented in order for the institution “to become more strategic in its use of a limited resource” (Self-Evaluation Report, p. 274). While the intent of this action and its relationship to institutional improvement is clear, there is no indication of assessment results on which the revised distribution is based.

The relationship painted by these examples is that in general “bright lines” that connect ISU assessment processes and actions taken to improve the institution are not evident. Perhaps the Self-Evaluation Report could have presented a different picture by placing more emphasis on the processes by which decisions were made and actions implemented (e.g., response to evaluators’ inquiries during the visit rather than the Self-Evaluation Report revealed the relationship between assessment and transformation of academic remediation programs). However, it is clear that results from core theme assessments have not been an important part of the institutional improvement process at the institution simply because core theme assessment is not a very mature process at ISU. While the reasons for the lack of results from core theme assessment are understandable in light of the circumstances (see Standard 4.A section of this report), the fact remains that ISU needs to make better use of results from rigorous assessment of progress on core theme outcomes in its efforts to improve institutional effectiveness.

Standard Five—Mission Fulfillment, Adaptation, and Sustainability

5.A Mission Fulfillment

ISU does engage in high quality evidence-based assessment and uses the results to inform decision-making. The Program Prioritization process, which addressed all ISU academic and non-academic units, and its use in planning and budgeting is an excellent example. Additional examples include professional and clinical academic programs that undergo reviews associated with specialized accreditation, licensure, and certification. At the institution-wide level, ISU participates in the SBOE-mandated annual review of its strategic plan. There are also systematic, participatory processes producing results that could be, but have not yet been, used for assessment of accomplishment (e.g., the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, which was administered in Spring 2013, but at the time of the preparation of the Self-Evaluation Report had not led to evidence-based assessments or actions; Self-Evaluation Report, p. 285).

However, these assessments and actions—while valuable and certainly related to analysis of accomplishment related to mission fulfillment—limit the scope of what is needed to meet the NWCCU expectation that “...the institution develops and publishes evidence-based evaluations regarding the extent to which it is fulfilling its mission” (Standard 5). The problems appear to be rooted in ISU’s definition of how it assesses extent or threshold of mission fulfillment, namely through assessment of objectives and indicators of core themes (Self-Evaluation Report, p. 33). The problems are at least threefold: 1) the core themes do not encompass a meaningful measure of the mission statement (see Standard 1.A section of this report), 2) the assessment of core theme indicators and objectives is in its infancy with very few actual assessments of performance relative to individual indicators (see Standard 3.B section of this report), and 3) there are inconsistent statements in the Self-Evaluation Report about the relationship between determinations of mission fulfillment and the core themes (see below).

At various points in the Self-Evaluation Report, the relationship between the evaluation of extent of mission fulfillment and the core themes is described in several different ways. Different sections of the Report contain statements that the determination of extent of mission fulfillment is based upon assessment of core theme objectives and indicators (Self-Evaluation Report, p. 33), the core themes themselves (Self-Evaluation Report, p. 34), measures (i.e., benchmarks) related to core theme indicators (Self-Evaluation Report, p. 285), and the core theme indicators themselves (Self-Evaluation Report, p. 285). Some of these discrepancies may simply be semantic, but the inconsistent linguistic reference to assessment of performance relative to core theme indicators (and associated benchmarks or thresholds) may also result from a lack of clarity about the details of assessing and making determinations of the extent of mission fulfillment.

Finally, there are issues related to the institution’s communication of its conclusions about mission fulfillment to appropriate constituencies and the public. While accessibility to the institution’s annually-updated strategic plan can be part of a plan to communicate determinations of mission fulfillment, this action on its own does not ensure communication of

the institution's overall assessment-based conclusions about mission fulfillment to appropriate constituencies and the public. For example, the strategic plan posted on the ISU website contains objectives, performance measures, and benchmarks but no information about performance, or, assessment of performance. ISU has a great story to tell about its mission, its related accomplishments, and the areas in which it seeks to improve. It would be well served by a more robust communication program to tell that story.

5.B Adaptation and Sustainability

While there is evidence for ISU's fulfillment of Adaptation and Sustainability, it is not mainly derived from the content of this section of the Self-Evaluation Report. Adaptation and Sustainability, as defined in Standard 5.B, are in some ways an institution-wide reflection or synergy of several of the preceding standards; for example, 5.B.1 is dependent upon the availability and utilization of widespread assessment efforts that inform institutional capacity to fulfill its objectives. As noted elsewhere in this report, the evaluators question the comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of ISU in the areas of Planning (3.A), Assessment (4.A & B), and Mission and Core Themes (1.B). These shortcomings indicate a possibility of unmet potential in fulfillment of Standard 5.B, which is based upon the achievement of those standards.

However, there is evidence of the institution's commitment to adaptation and sustainability in ISU's actions. For example, ISU has taken difficult and decisive action to improve the fiscal stability of the university by significantly increasing the financial reserves. This decision, made in the face of significant budgetary constraints, reflects an explicit emphasis on providing for the university's ability to continue to sustain mission and core themes.

Likewise, while the institution's response to Standard 5.B was not explicitly grounded in analysis directly related to mission and core themes, it did demonstrate capacity to perform rigorous analysis, grounded in planning and subsequent strategic redirection of resources in its Program Prioritization Process. The Program Prioritization Process (at this point a one-time, rather than "regular" exercise) also demonstrates the institution's ability to engage the internal environment in a discussion of a significant and potentially polarizing review. However, while there is a "demand" component in the Program Prioritization Process that provides evidence of careful monitoring of the external environment, the bulk of the narrative on environmental monitoring describes marketing and branding efforts; these activities are directed outward from within and are not focused on examining trends and developments in the larger world that will impact the university's ability to sustain its mission, core themes, and objectives into the future.

Conclusions

COMMENDATIONS

Commendation 1. The evaluation committee commends the institution for its approach to providing a safe and secure campus. Attention to the well being of the community is clearly a priority for ISU and has been achieved through collaboration and partnerships with on and off campus constituents.

Commendation 2. The evaluation committee commends the institution for its commitment to serving and promoting the success of students. Diverse interests, backgrounds, and levels of readiness for the university experience characterize ISU's student body. The evaluation committee observed a near universal commitment among faculty and staff to ensure that students are well served, supported and educated.

Commendation 3. The evaluation committee commends the institution for continuously engaging in community outreach on many different levels, providing demonstrable important services and interacting integrally with community and regional partners in numerous functions, collaborations, and projects.

Commendation 4. The evaluation committee commends the institution on its process of program prioritization. It engaged faculty, department heads, professional staff and administrators in a thoughtful, comprehensive, and inclusive process. It yielded information that appears to be guiding planning, budgeting, and strategic reallocation. It was accomplished collegially and is potentially a model for continuous improvement and achievement of mission fulfillment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. The evaluation committee recommends that the institution either revise its mission statement or review and revise its core themes, indicators, and benchmarks/targets to ensure that they encompass the entirety of the present mission statement. (Standard 1.B.1)

Recommendation 2. The evaluation committee recommends that the institution build upon its present governance framework by promoting an environment of transparency and collegiality, resulting in trust that encourages the expression and consideration of the views of faculty, staff, administrators, and students on matters in which they have a direct and reasonable interest. (Standard 2.A.1)

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

Recommendation 4. The evaluation committee recommends that the institution establish effective processes to ensure that ongoing, systematic assessment of the achievement of desired outcomes is used to inform and strengthen programs and services. (Standard 4.A)

Recommendation 5. The evaluation committee recommends that the institution develop and implement a process of ongoing assessment of student learning outcomes for its General Education program. (Standard 4.A)

Recommendation 6. The evaluation committee recommends that the institution use the results from assessment of core themes, programs, services, and student learning for institutional improvement. (Standards 4.B.1, 4.B.2)

Recommendation 7. The evaluation committee recommends that the institution use assessment results based on a comprehensive set of indicators to determine mission fulfillment and sustainability. (Standard 5.A.1, 5.A.2, 5.B.)