

**Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities**

**Idaho State University**

**Pocatello, Idaho**

**Year One Review Report**

**Fall, 2011**

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

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## **Evaluation Committee**

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## Introduction

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

The Year One Report addressed Standard One: Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations. The report was provided to committee members in a timely fashion, and the team had adequate time to review the report. The institution's self-evaluation report was clearly structured and of generally sufficient detail. There were sections that, as noted elsewhere in this report, would have been well served with more information. The background information for the past few years at Idaho State University was succinct, to the point, and direct. The evaluation team appreciates the clarity and honesty of this section. The information found in the year one self-study provided an initial understanding with respect to how ISU responded to the accreditation criteria.

Idaho State University experienced significant changes in the brief time since the 2009 interim report. Far-reaching changes in leadership, sharply decreased finances, implementation of new student-centered initiatives, a new policy process, and a major institutional reorganization provided a daunting workload level as ISU prepared its year one report. Many of the changes were in direct response to the one recommendation that arose out of the NWCCU 2009 interim visit. The recommendation was to improve campus working relationships, coordination, communication, and goal attainment. The university was diligent in addressing that recommendation.

## Eligibility Requirements

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

Idaho State University effectively and adequately responded to Eligibility Standards 2 (Authority) and 3 (Mission and Core Theme). The institution is authorized to operate and award degrees as a higher education institution by the Idaho State Board of Education and its authority is described in the appropriate state statutes.

*Eligibility Requirement 3: The institution's mission and core themes are clearly defined and adopted by its governing board(s) consistent with its legal authorization, and are appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education. The institution's purpose is to serve the educational interests of its students and its principal programs lead to recognized degrees. The institution devotes all, or substantially all, of its resources to support its educational mission and core themes.*

The currently approved mission statement for Idaho State University is focused and provides a clear direction for the institution. The mission is appropriately focused on the educational interests of students. The current mission was approved by the Idaho State Board of Education in September 2011. The mission is widely disseminated to the ISU campus and community. The report is not clear with regard to whether the core themes have been reviewed and approved by the Board of Regents. The 2013 Year Three Report should specifically address this requirement.

## **Standard One**

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

### **Standard 1.A Mission**

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

As noted, the Idaho State University mission was approved by the State Board of Education on September 9, 2011. The mission is appropriate to an institution of this type—the statement is broad enough to encompass a statewide purpose and detailed enough to provide direction for specific program authorization and development. Health sciences and attendant research hold a prominent place in the mission statement and in the discussion of mission interpretation. Part of the mission statement includes a listing of colleges and programs. Since all programs are not listed here, does this imply listed programs are more central to the institution?

The section on mission interpretation could have been more complete in its coverage of the full range of the mission statement. The points listed within mission interpretations are appropriate, but the latter sentences in the interpretation section paraphrase the mission without adding further illumination as to how the mission statement will be interpreted.

Mission fulfillment begins with a statement that appears to be inconsistent with previous statements in the self-study. The section begins, “Based on our interpretation of our mission, we have identified four core themes . . .” The mission statement was approved on September 9, 2011. On page 2 of the current report, the self-study indicates that the four core themes were developed in the winter of 2011 and shared with the campus beginning in February 2011. In the absence of further explanation, it appears that the core themes were developed before, or perhaps concurrently with, the mission statement.

As some of the core themes are only indirectly referenced in the mission statement, the link between the core themes and the mission statement is not strong.

### **Standard 1.B Core Themes**

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

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

Idaho State University has developed four core themes. They are a) learning and discovery, b) access and opportunity, c) leadership in health sciences, and d) community engagement and impact. Of these four, only health sciences is directly mentioned in the mission statement. The others are implied in the mission statement, but not directly stated. The explanatory language accompanying each objective is useful but doesn't include references back to the mission statement.

The four points of mission fulfillment on page 12 of the Year One Report are useful descriptions of how the mission is manifested. The four do not cover all aspects of the mission, as half of the mission statement is devoted listing specific programs.

The objectives related to each theme are appropriate to the theme and do an effective job operationalizing the theme. The intended outcomes for the first theme, with the exception of the first one, focus more on "normal" outcomes of instruction rather than innovation and creativity. Innovation and creativity are difficult to measure, but the presence of further indicators would assist in the assessment of these two important aspects of this theme. For some of the indicators, target levels of achievement may be difficult to determine. Will benchmarks for each indicator be established? How will they be determined?

Core theme two has very straightforward outcomes and indicators. Core theme three has clear outcomes. The indicators in theme three are exclusively numerical (as are the majority of the indicators in the other themes). The institution might want to explore some indicators related to satisfaction, quality, and similar measures. Core theme four outcomes and indicators effectively match the theme.

Given the numeric nature of the vast majority of all indicators, the goal of clear assessment is met. However, more description of how the data will be interpreted and how it will be used may assist the institution in determining which indicators will be most effective in assessing each objective.

## **Commendations and Recommendations**

Recommendation 1: The institution should revisit the core themes and connect them more directly to the mission. Three of the core themes indirectly relate to the mission, and the community engagement core theme does not flow from the mission statement. Std 1.B.1.

Recommendation 2: The institution should articulate the acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment for all identified indicators in the Standard One report. Std 1.A.2

Commendation 1: The institution, in the face of numerous challenges, has effectively met those challenges while developing its NWCCU Year One Report.

Commendation 2: The Institution has clearly defined indicators of achievement which are meaningful with direct measures of its objective. Std 1.B.1

## **Addendum**

### **Review of Responses to Recommendations**

#### **NWCCU Recommendations from the regular 2009 interim evaluation, Fall 2009.**

*Recommendation No. 1: The evaluation committee recommends that Idaho State University's leadership and administrators facilitate cooperative working relationships, promote coordination within and among organizational units, and encourage open communication and goal attainment (Standards 1.B.3., 4.A.2., 6.A.3., and 6.C.6).*

The majority of the changes made to the governing structure of ISU were in direct response to the recommendation that arose out of the NWCCU 2009 interim visit. The recommendation was to improve campus working relationships, coordination, communication, and goal attainment. The self-report indicates that the university was diligent in addressing that recommendation.