

Quality Summary Report – Western New Mexico University

Introduction

Western New Mexico University is a comprehensive regional university that began as a normal school in 1893. WNMU continues its tradition of teacher education complemented by other accredited professional programs in the health sciences, business, and human services while ensuring the availability of a strong core of liberal studies programs. The University also provides workforce development programs commonly found in a community college environment. Serving communities in the southwest and western parts of the state via its learning centers and well beyond this region through its virtual campus, Western takes pride in its graduates, its status as a Hispanic Serving Institution, its open access, and its involvement with the community stakeholders and partners it serves.

Update on AQIP Activities at WNMU

WNMU was an early adopter of AQIP as it rounded out its pursuit of continuous quality improvement initiated in 1994 with its first submission of an application to Quality New Mexico, the New Mexico organization overseeing Baldrige Performance Excellence awards and training/education. We attended Strategy Forums in 2001, 2005, and 2010; submitted System Portfolios in 2004, 2009, and most recently in November of 2013; received our first Quality Checkup in the spring of 2007 with reaffirmation under AQIP occurring in 11/2007. We have used our System Appraisal, Action Project, and Reaffirmation feedback to identify areas where additional improvement was needed.

These efforts were initially monitored by the WNMU Quality Council, made up of the senior leadership, AQIP Action Project Team co-chairs, and the leadership of our governance bodies. In spring of 2013, the University Planning Council (UPC) was chartered “to provide an integrated decision-making body designed to provide a broadly representative forum for sustained and informed deliberation about strategic opportunities facing Western New Mexico University; to reflect and comment on strategic planning and continuous improvement questions referred to it by the President’s Cabinet; to reflect and comment on the university’s annual budget-planning process; and to advise the President’s Cabinet through the Provost who serves as the Chair of the Council.”

Duties of the University Quality and Planning Committee, a committee of the UPC, include “ensur(ing) that quality improvement is ongoing, well-executed, and documented to meet the needs of all parties.” In effect, it was charged in conjunction with the UPC to take on the responsibilities of the former Quality Council with oversight through the UPC, Cabinet, and the president.

Action Project Summary and Status

Past and current action projects have allowed WNMU to focus attention on key areas in need of improvement. Historically we have taken on projects that were probably too large in scope and did not provide tight enough time lines. At the same time some of the projects were multifaceted (e.g., Scholarship of Teaching and Learning which included a student worker component as well as a more traditional scholarship component and the Communication project which encompassed everything from developing a unified events calendar to establishing an ombuds-person office to support faculty, staff, and student needs). With the exception of the first set of projects which were derived from internal input alone, projects since that date have incorporated the internal and external feedback resulting from the System Portfolio development, the System Appraisal report, quality checkup report, and other such external documents as well as partner and stakeholder feedback. More importantly, these projects have had a lasting impact on the campus that strengthened our quality journey and taught us valuable lessons.

Completed projects by start date with end dates in parentheses following the project include the following:

- 2002 Start Date: Improving Communication (2008), Funding (2004), Advising (2005)
- 2005 Start Date: Marketing (2007), Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (2008)
- 2007 Start Date: People First, initially Human Resources (2012), First Year Experience (2012)
- 2010 Start Date: Performance Measurement (2012)

2013 projects with a brief description of progress to date are as follows:

1. Enhance/Redesign Webpage for Accessibility and Student Recruitment and Enrollment (Phase One June 2014; Phase Two January 2015)

A major goal of this project was to enhance the ease of webpage use by prospective and newly admitted students. Other goals included expanding capability of current web-based services related to recruitment, enrollment, and accessibility; developing policies to support maintenance and updating of webpages to ensure accuracy and currency; and creating a web environment that meets the needs of students regardless of how they access the web.

At the end of fall term WNMU hired a person charged specifically with addressing website design and upkeep. Since then significant progress has been made related to browser support, screen size, face lifts to screens that new students regularly access, and webpages built that correspond to web advertising. While we were a bit ambitious on the timeline, by May the general template design will be ready for roll-out to departments with all key student recruitment and enrollment areas fully functional. The

redesign was done with the intent to allow for ease of faculty/staff updates to the site on a regular basis and will include procedures on how to edit/create/update pages with instructions embedded in the “edit page” view. During this spring and summer a second group will be charged to work with the web designer and others to catalogue accessibility issues, evaluate the website’s status with respect to them, and develop any needed accessibility standards for selection and use of curricular materials which upon faculty approval will be implemented.

2. Evaluate and Revise WNMU’s Strategic Planning Process (March/April 2014)

Goals for this project included refining the strategic planning process for compatibility with the University Planning Council (UPC) and its committees and other planning activities. Also we sought to adopt a process that supports agility and innovation in how we do business at WNMU. In addition, the UPC bylaws directed that the strategic planning process be transparent, inclusive (both internally and externally), and meet accreditation and BOR expectations.

Since September, the University Quality and Planning Council (QPC), the UPC Committee charged with implementing this action project, has met frequently (often weekly). Initially its efforts were directed towards [refining the strategic planning process](#). Once that was accomplished, it began developing elements of the [strategic plan](#) for review and approval of the UPC, the Cabinet, the president, and ultimately the Board of Regents (BOR). Plans call for the strategic plan to be submitted to the WNMU BOR at its March 2014 meeting. We will be closing out this project when we file our update this spring.

3. Evaluate and Redesign General Education Program and General Education Assessment (Spring 2015)

The current general education program has been in place for at least a decade. In that time, a statewide common core of transfer courses was defined. These factors and others made it apparent that the general education program needed to be revised and updated to ensure students achieved the desired competencies upon completion of the program or graduation. We further recognized that while we did a good job in assessing individual courses and disciplines within general education, we had no effective assessment of the program as a whole.

The University supported seven attendees at the HLC’s “Making a Difference in Student Learning: Assessment as a Core Strategy” with the intent of jump-starting this project. The team provided a follow-up report with a suggested timeline consistent with the initial description of the project to the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs. Although somewhat behind the original timeline, we are in the process of implementation with a team of faculty and staff (including those attending the conference) under the sponsorship of the Provost/VPAA. We will be making some

timing adjustments to the original Action Project when we submit our progress report this spring.

University Planning Council Activities

At its first meeting in February 2013, the UPC began the practicalities of defining and designing how it would go about meeting its responsibilities and how it interfaced with other campus bodies. One of its earliest activities in addition to molding the Bylaws into a workable document was to make recommendations to the Cabinet on the new Action Projects for WNMU. It was also a time of UPC committee formation, identification of individuals to serve on those committees, and developing protocols of how committees would go about their work. Some of the activities of the Committees are identified in the System Portfolio.

Fall of 2013 ushered in an opportunity for the UPC to better understand its role and scope as the planning documents became a critical part of meeting agendas. Mission, vision, values, goal statements, and environmental analysis became regular meeting agenda topics. UPC not only solicited suggestions on how to improve the draft materials but also counsel about how to ensure widespread campus input was gathered.

When fiscal issues appeared on the horizon and significant budget adjustments became necessary, the UPC advice was sought, as were ideas on restructuring. The System Appraisal Report, budget issues, and input from the committees of the UPC round out the most recent agenda items. Despite some extended discussions on these significant areas of concern, the UPC processes appear to be functioning in ways envisioned and that serve the institution.

Response to Systems Appraisal Feedback Report

1. Accreditation Items—Reading that “No accreditation issues [were] noted by the team” was most satisfactory; nevertheless, we analyzed the five (5) items that received only an “adequate but could be improved” notation to see how/whether it was appropriate to move those into “strong, clear, and well-presented,” and if so what additional documentation we needed to provide. Three (1A, 1C, 5C) core component items so noted related to the mission and planning and budgeting processes that were under review, new process approaches, or processes undergoing revision. A fourth (5D) recognized recent efforts to become more systematic in our performance improvement efforts but suggested that continuing to work on this would benefit the institution. The final item (2A) may not have been sufficiently addressed in the portfolio under the 2A designation and will be one we would like to have further discussion on during the visit. The independent audit reports, ombuds office, academic honesty policy, cash processes which require dual accountability, and defined grievance processes, are but a few other examples related to integrity in other functions that go beyond the limited items addressed within the Category 4 context. One campus discussion yet to be facilitated that would fall under this component is the discussion of what evidence must exist for the institution to verify that it is living its core values.

2. Responding to Strengths and Opportunities—There are a number of outstanding opportunities (OOs) related to results (3R4, 4R2, 5R2, 7R2, 8R1, 8R4, and 8R5) that reinforce the identification of metrics as a strategic challenge area (more below) for the university. Some progress on results occurred between the previous and the current Portfolio; however, especially in the area of Leading and Communicating substantive work remains if we are to fully understand whether those processes are effective and helping us to achieve our vision. Likewise we continue to struggle with identifying and analyzing specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely metrics related to Valuing People and metrics linking the various strategic planning elements. The new strategic plan will define targets, benchmarks or baseline information, comparative data, and desired outcomes and it will link to budget and programs and services. What remains to be determined is how effectively and quickly we will be able to build and implement the systems and processes that allow us to identify, collect, and modify the metrics we need to integrate all the essential elements into performance results.

Strategic Challenge Areas

The Appraisal Report identifies three strategic challenges that WNMU acknowledges as critical to its ability to successfully “shap(e) strategies for long-term performance improvement.” These areas are already under discussion and review in strategic planning efforts, UPC, dean’s council, and Cabinet meetings among other venues. The first two challenges are not surprises and we will be welcoming discussions with the visiting team and other colleagues regarding them; the third is one we for which will be seeking additional insight or clarity from the visiting team to make sure we appropriately understand its implications so we can adequately address the challenge.

- Challenge 1: Process Campus discussions identified the lack of consistent process implementation as an element that needs to be addressed. In some cases this is due to inadequate communication by process owners (lack of documentation, consistent application, etc.) and in other cases it rests with a lack of training in process implementation. Students are especially vulnerable when processes are not clearly articulated, consistently implemented, and regularly assessed as to relevancy. Student members of UPC have been very articulate about the need to address this area. This, in fact, was where we began our quality journey in 1995 with support from Sandia National Laboratory. This is certainly an area where your insights and feedback will be beneficial and may be a strong candidate for an Action Project in the near future.
- Challenge 2: Metrics While we feel we have made progress since the previous 2009 Portfolio with greater emphasis on data to inform decision making, there remains much to be done. Increasingly there is information/discussion on the way that data will help us to better understand where we have gaps in our processes and performance. One of the biggest deterrents to a more aggressive approach to using data has been the difficulty of supporting data/information collection and analysis with a single-person institutional research office that is often overwhelmed with the myriad reports necessary just to meet

federal and state directives. However, without the trend, benchmark, and target data that informs decision making we cannot understand where improvement possibilities best lie.

What the Systems Portfolio taught us (once again) was that often there is data that is ignored or that we fail to use it and that a culture of using data is not yet a part of the total University. At the same time there are units, especially in the support services areas, that are developing some expertise in collecting and using metrics to guide changes in their processes. Expectations of senior leaders are also changing with data being a more critical element as they make decisions. We look forward to some significant discussion of issues around the topic of building a culture of data informed decision making during the visit.

- **Challenge 3: Communication** As mentioned above, this challenge did not come across as clearly to us as the other two. There are strong lines of communication within the governance bodies; one of the functions of the UPC was to ensure stronger two-way communication; the president consistently meets with faculty and staff at least two and often three times a year to share information and meets with each department or unit during the fall. Faculty and staff listservs provide established vehicles for campus-wide communication. Since the Portfolio was submitted, a biweekly publication provides information about people, processes, and events on the campus and several forums occurred to discuss mission, vision, values, and what a student-centered university looks like.

Perhaps the need to “develop more formal communication processes to ensure consistency, formality, and integrity of message” relates somewhat to the weaknesses we have diagnosed under the process challenge or knowledge management areas. We would like to explore in more depth what “replication at all levels” and “coordinated among units” might look like.

Issues Update

In addition to updates provided in the information above there are other activities that have occurred during the time between the submission of the Portfolio and today. A few of these are highlighted below.

Financial/Budget Issues— To meet the 3% Higher Education Department required fund balance for FY 2014-2015 we determined that \$2.9M of funding must be identified. The University is reviewing revenue generating opportunities, to include the current Tuition Policy, to determine what changes may be appropriate to generate additional revenues. Expenditures are also being reviewed to determine ways we can do things more efficiently and effectively. Several potential areas of expenditure reductions have been identified with the University continuing to assess all areas before finalizing any cuts. Due to timeline constraints, probationary faculty whose contracts were not renewed received notification of non-renewal according to *Faculty Handbook* guidelines. At the visit we will share in greater detail what further budget adjustments will be/have been implemented since those decisions are still in process.

A new resource available to the team in our supplementary documents identifies the approach WNMU used to address the [current fiscal year shortfall](#). Additionally, by the time the team arrives, the budget process will have identified areas of decrease/reallocation or revenue generation necessary to meet FY 14-15 required fund balance. The fiscal issues created much angst across the campus as people assume the worst until they know what will be done. The president issues [weekly memoranda](#) to keep the campus informed about decisions or seeking feedback on ideas and a webpage exists to gather [input on ideas](#) that might lead to cost savings or new revenues. The Cabinet reviewed this input prior to making its initial recommendations to the president.

Master Plan Progress—The Campus Master Plan will be presented to the Board of Regents at its March meeting along with the strategic plan. Campus and local community groups and individuals were included in this process as were the strategic planning preliminary thoughts and ideas.

Technology—With some of the new software IT acquired for monitoring its equipment and with a broad campus inventory process, IT leadership has collected substantive information about the hardware, computer labs, and other relevant technology information. [Comparing this to national Educause data](#), they provided some information that awakened campus constituents to the “state” of technology on campus and the costs that might be involved in ensuring currency and addressing other related issues.

University Restructure—The university is stepping back from a five-college model to a two-college model in part to address the fiscal situation and in part from learnings that occurred during the initial restructure. Two colleges—the college of arts and sciences and the college of professional studies—will house the various academic units. These units may also undergo some additional consolidation which should be finalized by the time of the visit. The Provost/VPAA and President are meeting with the faculty governance bodies on [proposed changes](#).

What the Future Holds

The Systems Portfolio process and the subsequent feedback in the Appraisal Report, together with the financial issues and our reviews of the new mission, vision, core values, and strategic goals that has occurred over the last six months generated significant discussion across the campus about who we are, where we are going, and how best to get there. Gaps in processes such as how we update and maintain the Portfolio or how we integrate planning, budgeting, and performance appraisals have generated substantive discussions and created some momentum for change. WNMU’s quality journey has been reinvigorated and adjusted to a new set of roadmaps that include some old and some new avenues. We look forward to the team’s visit to help us examine whether we have wisely chosen paths that will move us closer to better serving our students, workforce, and the communities we serve; equally we look forward to clarifying areas that are not clear to us or to the team.