Year One Peer-Evaluation Report

University of Nevada, Reno
November 11, 2011

A confidential report of findings prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
Table of Contents

I. Evaluators..........................................................................................................................3

II. Introduction.......................................................................................................................4

III. Assessment of Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials.........................4

IV. Eligibility Requirements....................................................................................................4

V. Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations
   a. Standard 1.A.1 Mission...............................................................................................4
   b. Standard 1.A.2 Mission...............................................................................................5
   c. Standard 1.B.1 Core Themes.......................................................................................5
   d. Standard 1.B.2 Core Themes.......................................................................................5

VI. Previous Evaluation..........................................................................................................5

VII. Summary..........................................................................................................................7

VIII. Commendations and Recommendations.................................................................7
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II. Introduction

The University of Nevada, Reno (hereafter referred to as the University) is the State of Nevada’s historic flagship and land-grant institution. It serves over 17,000 students through eight colleges and offers baccalaureate degrees in 68 fields, master’s degrees in 63 fields, and doctoral degrees in 38 fields. The University has undergone significant changes in key leadership positions since its Comprehensive Evaluation in 2007. As summarized on page 54 of the self-evaluation, extensive leadership changes have occurred in the following positions: president, provost, three vice presidents, and seven college deans. Of some concern is the number of interim appointments, namely, the president, provost, and four of the college deans have interim titles.

The University has experienced significant budget cuts. As described in the 2010 Focused Interim Report, the University had experienced a 13.1% budget reduction that included the loss of several programs and approximately 400 positions. According to page 50 of the self-evaluation, budget reductions have continued, and the University’s FY12 budget is 13.78% less than its FY11 budget. Consequences of these budget shortfalls on the University’s mission fulfillment are unknown.

III. Assessment of Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The University’s self-evaluation consists of 74 pages, including nine appendices. Pages 7-20 are devoted to Standards 1A and 1B, and appendix B (pages 23-45) is comprised of the 2009-2015 Strategic Plan. Appendix F (pages 55-58) summarizes the 2009 and 2010 Interim Report comments to the 11 recommendations from the 2007 Comprehensive Evaluation, but does not provide information on the University’s efforts to address the 2009-2010 recommendations that were not deemed to be fully met by the Interim Reports.

IV. Eligibility Requirements

Regarding requirement two, the University is established under the Nevada constitution, and is governed by an elected Board of Regents of the Nevada System of Higher Education. Eligibility requirement three will be addressed in the sections below.

V. Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

a. Standard 1.A.1 Mission

The mission statement of the University was approved by the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents on December 3, 2009. It is widely publicized, clear, and provides direction for the institution’s efforts. The University’s interpretation of mission fulfillment is consistent with its designation as a state-assisted, land-grant, doctoral-granting university with a high level of research.
The self-evaluation does not articulate evidence that the mission is derived from and generally understood by the University’s community.

b. **Standard 1.A.2 Mission**

In its mission statement, the University defines mission fulfillment in terms of teaching, research, and service at levels consistent with the expectations of a land-grant, doctoral-granting, research university; disciplinary and specialized accreditations; program review; as articulated in the University’s strategic plan 2009-2015. The 2009-2015 Strategic Plan is comprised of 8 goals. Goal one has five sub-goals, but each goal (and goal one’s sub-goals) contain lists of “planning goals” that number between four and 14, and many of these planning goals have multiple components. To the extent that these numerous goals reflect mission fulfillment, an acceptable threshold is defined or implied for many but not all of these goals.

c. **Standard 1.B.1 Core Themes**

The University has identified four core themes; these four core themes are components of the mission statement. Each of the four core themes is further articulated by goals, sub-goals, and planning goals from the 2009-2015 Strategic Plan. The clarity regarding the focus of the institution, the direction for its efforts, its priorities for the allocation of resources, and the determination of its capacities is decreased based on the length and complexity of the core themes.

d. **Standard 1.B.2 Core Themes**

As described above regarding Standard 1.A.2., the University lists numerous goals, sub-goals, and planning goals with multiple components. While the term “objective” is not used in the University’s 2009-2015 Strategic Plan, some assessable indicators are defined or implied for some goals, but the number of goals is a concern. On pages 59-62 of the self-evaluation, entitled “Institutional Strategic Plan Summary Tables,” there are some data related to goals 1 and 7 only. But the data presented in these Summary Tables do not clearly map onto the goals of the Strategic Plan. For example, the first planning goal under Goal 1A (page 6), is “Comprehensive: offer bachelors’ degrees in a broad range of the arts, humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, engineering, agriculture, health sciences, business, journalism, and education.” The Summary Tables do not address the breadth of bachelor’s degrees offered.

The University should develop clearly defined, meaningful, verifiable and assessable objectives and indicators. The University should establish baseline data for the indicators and set targets to measure their progress.

VI. **Previous Evaluation**
The University had a comprehensive evaluation in fall of 2007 that resulted in eleven recommendations, as well as a focused interim evaluation in October 2010 to follow up on six recommendations (1, 2, 4, 7, 9, and 10) suggested by a previous focused interim evaluation in spring 2009. The 2009 evaluation found that the University was in compliance with or had made good progress regarding recommendations 3, 5, 6, 8, and 11. The October 2010 focused interim evaluation added one new recommendation. The Commission rescinded this recommendation at its February 2011 meeting, but expressed concern for adequate human resources. The self-evaluation lists each of those recommendations and excerpts from those reports, but does not provide commentary on the University’s efforts to continue work in these areas.

Recommendation 1: The Committee strongly endorses the President’s recently reconstituted strategic planning initiative and equally strongly recommends that the University ensure that the effort is metrics-driven, truly participatory, and leads to specific institutional and unit plans, which will, in turn, inform the process of resource allocation, and that the process itself be clearly linked to the University’s mission, specific goals, and have metrics of measurement. (Standards 1.B, 7.A.2).

The 2010 Interim Report felt that the strategic planning standards have been met. However, that Report stated that the metrics were “under active development,” and it appears further work is needed to develop a set of metrics that align with the strategic plan.

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends that the University assess the appropriateness of its extensive use of Letters of Appointment (LOA) staff and Graduate Teaching Assistants. (Standard 2.C.7).

According to the 2010 Interim Report, the University was in compliance with this standard.

Recommendation 4: Academic Advising – The Committee acknowledges the progress the University has made over the past ten years expanding and improving academic advising. But it also recognizes different expectations of faculty regarding academic counseling versus assistance with course selection and the related inconsistencies in student satisfaction. The Committee recommends the University clearly define what academic advising means to all constituents, more fully identify intended outcomes of advising, better articulate this to faculty and students, and then fully assess how well the outcomes are being met. (Standard 2.C.5 and 3.D.10).

According to the 2010 Interim Report, the University was in compliance with the first portion of this recommendation but had not yet assessed academic advising outcomes.

Recommendation 7: The Committee recommends that the Board of Regents engage in a comprehensive planning exercise regarding the future of health science education within the University System and the respective roles of UNR and UNLV and thereby further distinguish the missions of the respective institutions. (Standard 1.1 and 6.B.5).
The University was deemed in compliance with this Standard according to the 2010 Interim Report.

**Recommendation 9:** Noting that financial uncertainty can readily lead to program instability, the Committee recommends that the University ensure appropriate staffing of LOA’s, graduate assistant, and support of staff across the institution, and that the process by which this is achieved is clearly delineated and observed. (Standards 2.A.1, 3.D.6, and 7.B.5).

The 2010 Interim Report, “require that Standards 2.A.1, 3.D.6, and 7.B.5 continue to be monitored,” and included a new recommendation of restoring state investment commensurate with mission and expectation. This recommendation was rescinded by the Commission, and in the meantime, according to pages 59 of the self-evaluation, numbers of faculty have decreased as student enrollments have increased.

**Recommendation 10:** The Committee recommends that the University establish a transparent and comprehensive process to address the institution’s space needs and related issues. (Standard 8.C.1, 2, 3, and 4).

According to the 2010 Interim Report, the University is in compliance with this standard.

**VII. Summary**

The University’s mission statement is approved by its governing board. The four components of the mission statement align with the four core themes, which are addressed by the 2009-2015 Strategic Plan for the University. However, no evidence is provided regarding the mission statement being generally understood by its community. There are numerous goals, many of which have associated indicators that vary in clarity, assessability, and the availability of benchmarks or baseline data.

The University has undergone significant changes in leadership and appears to be facing ongoing fiscal challenges. While the 2009 and 2010 Interim Reports found that the University addressed 9 of 11 Recommendations from the 2007 Comprehensive Evaluation, 2 Recommendations were not found to be fully addressed according to the Interim Reports (Recommendations 4 and 9), and no information was presented regarding the University’s activities and progress since the Interim Report on any of the 2007 Recommendations.

**VIII. Commendations and Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** Evaluators recommend that the University document how its community is aware of the mission statement and understands it. (Standard 1.A.1)
Recommendation 2: Evaluators recommend that the University articulate accomplishments or outcomes that represent acceptable thresholds or extents of mission fulfillment. (Standard 1.A.2)

Recommendation 3: Evaluators recommend that the University improve the focus and clarity of their core themes to provide clear direction for its efforts, including the allocation of resources and the determination of its capacities. (Standard 1.B.1)

Recommendation 4: Evaluators recommend that the institution define clear objectives for each theme, and define specific indicators for each objective including methods and sources for data collection and other information to demonstrate assessability; establish its baseline data for each indicator; and determine appropriate targets to measure progress. (Standard 1.B.2)

Recommendation 5 (unaddressed component of Recommendation 4 from the 2007 Comprehensive Report): Evaluators recommends the University fully assess how academic advising outcomes are being met. (Standard 2.C.5 and 3.D.10).

Recommendation 6 (unaddressed Recommendation 9 in the 2007 Comprehensive Report): Evaluators recommend that the University define and ensure appropriate levels of staffing across the institution. (Standards 2.A.1, 3.D.6, and 7.B.5).