

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

University of Alaska Southeast

Juneau, Sitka, and Ketchikan, Alaska

Year One Review Report

Fall, 2011

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

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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 the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS). The committee reviewed the reports from the Regular Decennial Report conducted in fall 2009, the Commission recommendations to the institution in its letter dated January 2010, the University of Alaska Southeast 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. The report introduction, institutional context, and preface were well organized, well written and informative. The evaluation team appreciates the clarity of these sections. The information found in the Year one self-study provided an initial understanding with respect to how UAS responded to the accreditation criteria.

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.

The University of Alaska System was established by the state constitution. It is governed by the University of Alaska Board of Regents. The University of Alaska System is composed of a system office, one separately accredited community college, and three separately accredited universities of which the University of Alaska Southeast is one.

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 the University of Alaska Southeast is focused and provides a clear direction for the institution. The mission is appropriate and focused on the educational interests of students. The mission was approved by the University of Alaska Board of Regents in 2011. The mission is widely disseminated to the UAS campuses and communities.

The university developed a new strategic plan for 2010-2017. The development process was described well. The plan includes a prominent focus on assessment and the plan is titled “Strategic and Assessment Plan.” The planning cycle is aligned with the regional accreditation cycle. The institution has experienced leadership changes and the new leadership has made effective planning and assessment a priority. It is clear that the institution’s focus is driven in part by the region, its unique features and the needs of the three campuses. Leadership, shared governance, and infrastructure have all received concentrated attention.

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.

Mission:

The mission of the University of Alaska Southeast is student learning enhanced by faculty scholarship, undergraduate research and creative activities, community engagement, and the cultures and environment of Southeast Alaska.

The currently approved mission statement for the University of Alaska Southeast is focused and provides a clear direction for the institution.

The UAS mission recognizes the institution’s commitment to instruction at different academic levels, success of all students, and service to Alaska’s diverse peoples and communities.

The mission statement is clear, direct, and adapted for the location of the institution. It places student learning at the forefront of the mission. The process of developing the mission led to a solid sense of community across the instruction and will serve as a guide for the future.

Standard 1.A.2. The institution defines mission fulfillment in the context of its purpose, characteristics, and expectations. Guided by that definition, it articulates institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment.

UAS defines mission fulfillment as follows.

The mission of the University of Alaska Southeast is student learning enhanced by faculty scholarship, undergraduate research and creative activities, community engagement, and the cultures and environment of Southeast Alaska.

Mission fulfillment for UAS is developing, but little substantive content was covered in the self-study. The work has just begun and UAS looks forward to reporting more fully on mission fulfillment in its Year Three Report.

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.

Standard 1.B Core Themes

Core Theme One: Student Success

Provide the academic support and student services that facilitate access and completion of educational goals.

Core Theme Two: Teaching and Learning

Provide a broad range of programs and services resulting in student engagement and empowerment for academic excellence.

Core Theme Three: Community Engagement

Provide programs and services that connect with local, state, national, and international entities on programs, events, services, and research that respond to the economic, environmental, social, and cultural needs and resources of Southeast Alaska.

Core Theme Four: Research and Creative Expression

Provide programs and services that support research, scholarship, and creative expression by faculty and students.

UAS has a clearly defined mission statement and has linked mission fulfillment to objectives that are connected to the institution's core themes. The four core themes—student success, teaching and learning, community engagement, and research and creative expression—flow logically from the mission statement.

Each core theme is then more specifically defined and described. Objectives for each theme are logical extensions of the theme and the indicators should provide

useful data to determine progress on theme and mission fulfillment. One might argue that other indicators might be useful (for example, overall participation rate from the population of potential students), but the indicators chosen are logical and useful.

Commendations and Recommendations

Recommendation 1: 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 has clearly defined indicators of achievement that are meaningful and direct measures of its objective. Std 1.B.1

Addendum

Review of Responses to Recommendations

NWCCU Recommendations from the Regular Decennial Report (Fall 2009)

Recommendation One: Mission. While the mission of the University of Alaska Southeast is clearly and directly presented, still, the University identity sometimes seems to be at odds with itself in its interpreting this mission. We recommend that the University revisit its mission and the full range of programs and offerings under the umbrella of this mission to affirm itself as a fully integrated university dedicated to a common purpose.

The institution embarked on a strategic planning process that resulted in a new mission statement. The process was inclusive and increased campus unity. The plan guides resource allocations, program development, and institutional priorities. The new mission statement and plan have increased internal consistency resulting in a more unified and cohesive shared mission across the university.

Recommendation Two: Communication. The evaluation committee recommends that the University review its strategies and systems for communication within and across units for greater understanding and progress toward shared and explicit goals.

New steps were taken to reorganize a number of groups and councils, increase public meetings, and increase written communication. These steps will increase the amount of face-time between members of the institution. The plan could address the use of other forms of mediated communication (web, social media, flyers, announcements, etc.) as a further means to increase the follow of communication. UAS might include an assessment of these efforts.

Recommendation Three: Assessment. While the University has undertaken an ambitious planning effort this last decade, UAS is not yet fully realizing the benefits of this planning. In some cases, evaluation activities fall short of yielding the information that will lead to program modifications for improvement. As the University begins its next cycle of strategic planning, it will be well-served by identifying those evaluation strategies that will best measure desired outcomes. With those assessment activities in place, the assessment loop will be completed, yielding ongoing opportunities for evaluation and improvement. The committee recommends that UAS extend this strengthened assessment for improvement to include academic, co-curricular, and student learning outcomes.

UAS developed its new strategic plan with assessment in the title and the plan includes assessment throughout. Assessment processes and reporting have been regularized and made more consistent, and faculty and staff have received increased training. In addition to academic assessment, the institution has improved its program review process and has

begun assessment of core administrative operating functions. The assessment processes have not been in place long enough to complete the process and “close the loop.” The Year Three Report should address the completion of the assessment process.

Recommendation Four: Budget Processes. The evaluation committee recommends that the University review its budget processes to make certain that they best serve the goals and purposes of the University. This review will allow the University to make certain that appropriate opportunities to make budget decisions and to report and act on these decisions are delegated to those who need the information to effectively carry out their work.

The single most important part of the response to this recommendation is the inclusion of budgetary decision making with the UAS Strategic and Assessment Plan. Budget processes were streamlined and publicized, and budget authority (where possible) moved down to administrative layers most closely associated with expenditures. In line with recommendation number 2, various communication channels and media have been utilized to keep the university community more informed about and involved in the budget process.