

# **COMPREHENSIVE YEAR SEVEN PEER-EVALUATION REPORT**

**GREAT BASIN COLLEGE**

**ELKO, NEVADA**

**APRIL 15-17, 2013**

*A confidential report of findings prepared for  
The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities*

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## Introduction and Institutional Context

A seven-person evaluation team (“the Committee”) conducted a Year Seven Evaluation Visit to Great Basin College (“GBC” or “the College”) from April 15 through April 17, 2013. The visit covered Standard One through Standard Five in response to the *Year Seven Report* submitted by the College to the Commission on March 4, 2013.

The College administration, faculty, staff, and students were welcoming and kind hosts who also participated in impressively large numbers at our open sessions and made themselves otherwise available throughout the visit. The Committee compliments the helpful and pleasant staff at every level of the institution. A pervasive spirit of goodwill is found everywhere at Great Basin College, fueled by a deep sense of pride for the College’s service to rural Nevada and its long-standing leadership as the first community college in the state with an ongoing pattern of “firsts.” The first to offer an accelerated degree and the first to offer baccalaureate degrees are just two of many examples.

The College's report documented and analyzed its efforts toward mission fulfillment. The Committee conducted numerous interviews with both individuals and groups and met separately with the chairman of the College's Advisory Board as well as with Dan Klaich, Chancellor of the Nevada State System of Higher Education (“NSHE”), Regents Chairman Jason Geddes, and Regent Kevin Melcher. Evaluators also reviewed numerous College documents before and during the visit. When requested, additional documents were promptly supplied.

The Committee noted that faculty and staff are very supportive of one another’s work, especially as times have gotten harder with financial troubles brought on by a weak Nevada economy that has been further eviscerated by the Great Recession. One administrator commented that GBC has been “proud to do more with less but is reaching the point of diminishing returns. The fiscal outlook of Nevada is extremely poor, and GBC is subject to the fiscal health of the entire state. Now we have reached a point where we are being asked to do less with less. That is a big challenge for us.” The good news is that solidarity and resilience is in no short supply. As one longtime staff member put it, “We have faced many problems together, and we have always solved them together,” while another noted, “It’s the Wild West frontier spirit of just taking care of whatever needs to be done.”

The College is still recovering from cuts that have been made as a result of Nevada’s economic downturn, though the Elko economy is flourishing because of its base in the mining industry, which has remained strong throughout hard times. In spite of local prosperity, though, the lion’s share of revenues to the College flow not from local streams but from the state’s allocation, which means that the booming local economy has little bearing on the College’s context except that real estate prices make it difficult to recruit new faculty and staff and that the local industry is very supportive of workforce development programs because business is booming.

The Committee discovered many indicators that the College’s faculty has great passion for teaching and learning with authentic commitment to student success. At its core, the College is focused on its fundamental mission of facilitating student success and does this in a comprehensive fashion across the range of its programs and services. Chancellor Klaich put it

this way: “The College is doing well with good graduation rates, with carefully identified programs to serve its area, and with a strong relationship with industry.” These efforts make Great Basin College, in the Chancellor’s view, “a poster child for why community colleges exist.” Regent Melcher emphasized that this positive view is the predominant one held by community members at large. He expressed his hope that the administration, faculty, and staff will fully comprehend that the community at large routinely regards the College and their work as outstanding.

Within this context of high regard, the Chancellor and Regents expressed the perspective that these are times of historic transformation in higher education. Specifically, the question of how to bring productive change to the entire system of Nevada higher education is what they are grappling with. In the Chancellor’s words, they are “in the process of reinventing higher education in Nevada for the next 10 or 20 years” through new policies targeted on tuition and fees pricing, new collaboration models, aggressive student e-learning models, and, most controversial at the local level, performance-based funding that will reimburse colleges for completed semester credit hours rather than the FTE count from initial class enrollment. The new allocation model has triggered scenario budget planning at the College with cuts that range along a continuum with a low of \$700,000 to a high of \$4.5 million. The latter figure is roughly one-third of the College’s state allocation.

The Committee discovered an understandable conflict between two equally valid system perspectives. The local system (GBC) has specific strategic goals and desired ends, while the state system (NSHE), bundles those goals and ends along with those of the other colleges and universities in Nevada to form the means that serve the larger strategic goals and ends at the NSHE level. The important policy questions being grappled with include both perspectives, which creates an environment for which there are no easy answers. To avoid the standstill that can be caused by this sort of complexity, the Chancellor and Regents are making decisions that are transformational but quite stressful, especially when seen through the College perspective.

The most critical example of this concerns the system’s allocation model. At the NSHE level, the Chancellor and Regents are struggling with how to fulfill their stewardship role for the entire state in an era of rapid southern growth that comes without new revenue. The likely zero sum game includes challenging questions such as, “How does Nevada keep its fees affordable and create access for the swelling population in Clark County?” At the college system level, GBC employees and students see dollars shifting from north to south and express the concern that the new funding formula might unfairly favor the *number* of completions rather than the *percentage* of completions. GBC stands to lose a considerable amount of funding because the rural nature of its service keeps the number of enrolled and completed credit hours constant, at best, while the southern part of the state continues to grow and can easily increase its numbers while not by being compelled to worry about completion percentages.

These new policy directions are properly the determination of the governing Board of Regents. That said, the Committee notes that while there is much stress about how the College will be reshaped, the general focus on student success is strong.

The response to this stressful change is a theme that runs through this report, especially as it pertains to the College's sense of how effectively it can plan for an uncertain future as an end in itself rather than as part of the overall NSHE umbrella. Many at the College are focused on GBC as its own complex system, with 60 percent of its FTE served through distance learning modalities while serving 62,000 square miles of rural Nevada. As mentioned earlier, the faculty and staff that the Committee interviewed see GBC as a long-time leader of productive change in the state, having been the first community college, the first to offer accelerated degrees, the first to create baccalaureate degrees, the first to create Interactive Video ("IAV") degree paths at multiple satellite centers across the service area, among other examples, and the local desire to continue to build on that legacy is vibrant and powerful.

The work ahead, while needing progress in the planning, assessment, and continuous improvement model for mission fulfillment, will build upon the substantial efforts of highly dedicated faculty and staff who have made GBC the great college that it is today. The Committee hopes that this response to the College's self-evaluation will assist in taking this very fine institution to higher levels of success through further refinement of the alignment between Mission, Core Themes, and Indicators and by further developing its approaches to planning, assessment, and continuous improvement.

## Standard One: Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

The NSHE Board of Regents adopted the most recent version of Great Basin College's mission statement into policy on December 2, 2011. The mission statement is widely published and generally understood by the community. The basic shape of the College's work is identified in the following statement.

*Great Basin College enriches people's lives by providing student-centered, post-secondary education to rural Nevada. Educational, cultural, and related economic needs of the multicounty service area are met through programs of university transfer, applied science and technology, business and industry partnerships, developmental education, community service, and student support services in conjunction with certificates and associate and select baccalaureate degrees.*

The Committee is concerned that the articulation of mission fulfillment, as expressed in the *Year Seven Report*, does not provide a clear metric(s) for this measurement. The report states, "The expression of acceptable mission fulfillment encapsulating these themes is provided in detail in Section II of this Chapter," but only the indicators are provided in Standard 1.B, rather than the indicators and some measurable assessment of outcomes that would define the College's threshold of acceptable performance and fulfillment of mission (Standards 1.A and 1.B.).

The College distilled the Mission Statement into three Core Themes intended to encompass its measurable achievements and outcomes. These include (a) *Provide Student Enrichment*; (b) *Build Bridges*; and (c) *Serve Rural Nevada*. The Committee feels that it is important to note that the Mission Statement seems to be intended as an expansive statement of the College's essential purpose rather than a literal guide to measurable phenomenon, so it is duly noted that some elements of the Mission Statement (meeting economic needs, for example) are not explicitly expressed in the Core Themes. This style choice seems fine as long as the Core Themes are a distillation of that essential purpose, which certainly seems to be the case.

GBC has identified unique indicators for each of these Core Theme objectives. Each of these indicators is assessable and verifiable and serve to demonstrate an emerging culture of evidence that is being fostered at GBC, but the Committee is concerned that although the indicators may provide an adequate baseline for further analysis, it is difficult to see how many of the indicators will provide meaningful data by which to measure Core Theme fulfillment. For example, it is unclear how an inventory of educational programs (Theme 1, Objective 1.1, Indicators of "Opportunity" and "Outcomes, *Year Seven Report*, p. 5) directly provides student enrichment or how the demographics of the service area (Theme 1, Objective 1.2, Indicators, *Year Seven Report*, p. 5) help to foster cultural awareness.

The Committee encourages the College to carefully attend to issues of validity in the connective tissue between Theme, Objective, and Indicator, as the link is not always apparent or explicitly measurable. The key question, overall, is, "To what degree does the indicator actually measure the objective it purports to measure?" The Committee encourages the College to continue revising from the Indicators upward to the Objectives to the individual Core Themes as well as using the downward approach to strengthen the links between each.



**Concern:** Though the indicators may provide an adequate baseline for further analysis of the Core Themes, it is difficult to see how a majority of the indicators will provide meaningful data by which to measure core theme fulfillment.

**Recommendation One: Mission Fulfillment**

While the College has done excellent work to revise the conceptual framework that provides improved congruence between its mission and core themes, the Committee recommends that the College continue this work by developing a definition of Mission Fulfillment that identifies achievement at an acceptable threshold in measurable terms. (Standard 1.A.2)

## Standard Two: Resources and Capacity

### Eligibility Requirements

As these sections on Standard Two will make clear, the College is substantially in compliance with eligibility requirements four through 21 as well as the basic components of Standard Two. The College infrastructure—human, technological, financial—demonstrates the requisite capacity for mission fulfillment.

### Governance

An overarching 13-member Board of Regents is elected to serve the districts that compose the overall system known as the Nevada System of Higher Education (“NSHE”). The Board employs a Chancellor as its Chief Executive Officer, and the Chancellor oversees the work of the college and university presidents, who are delegated institutional decisions. The President is the appointing authority for faculty, staff, and administration. A well-coordinated system of shared governance operates within the College and includes a faculty senate, a classified council, a student government, a community advisory board, and the President’s council. Within this structure, authority, roles, and responsibilities are clear with regular input from faculty, staff, and students. These entities meet on a regular basis to discuss issues, suggest policy and procedures, and to serve generally as advisory groups to the President, who is responsible for final decisions.

### Governing Board

The governing Board of Regents is composed of 13 popularly elected members. No Board member has any real or perceived conflict of interest. Though elected to serve a geographically defined district, each Regent is responsible for attending to the system as a whole. In the case of GBC, for example, Regent Melcher resides in Elko, but the 62,000 square mile district that elected him has its southern border a mere 60 miles away from Las Vegas, which is 430 miles from Elko, where the main campus is located. The Board functions, therefore, as a committee of the whole and revises its policies and performs appropriate self-evaluation as well as evaluation of the President.

### Leadership and Management

The College has an effective system of leadership with qualified administrators who have appropriate levels of responsibility and accountability. A chief executive officer and qualified administrators are responsible for planning, organizing, and managing the institution, but the Committee noted that budget cuts have added responsibilities and duties to many administrators as attrition has created a more lean and flat organization.

While the College is to be complimented for doing whatever it takes to make the College serve students well, the Committee is concerned that the staff work may be close to a tipping point into a situation where certain individuals are wearing too many hats. As the report notes, since 2008, “several mid-level administrative positions have been eliminated or held vacant due to budget cuts and reorganization [including] Dean of Extended Studies, Deputy to the President, Director

of Human Resources, Director of Computer Services, Director of Student Life, and Director of the Pahrump Valley Center” (*Year Seven Report*, p. 21) with all of these duties absorbed by existing personnel. The Vice President for Student Services, whose heart for service is huge, is known to answer the switchboard whenever necessary. This is laudable, even exemplary of the non-hierarchical and democratic spirit of the community college, but it may be pulling her away from higher value work. It also appears to be common for individuals to work seven days a week. The Committee learned that if someone works too many weekends in a row, he or she is encouraged to take a day off. The Committee is concerned that burnout and depressed morale will eventually occur.

## **Policies and Procedures**

### **Academics**

Academic policies are developed and revised at the College and NSHE level, with the necessary requirement that any locally developed policies need to be consistent with the overall system policy. Policies are clearly communicated to various constituencies through a variety of readily available documents, including the College catalog, an employee handbook, and the College website. Academic policies are transparent, widely understood, and contain appropriate processes regarding transfer of credit, class scheduling, non-discrimination, drop/add/withdrawal, incompletes, repeating or auditing a course, challenge examinations, use of information resources, and academic standards.

### **Library Policies**

The GBC library has policies and procedures regarding access and the use of five library services and resources: audio-visual, circulation, government documents, interlibrary loan, and reference. The library also has a collection development policy to guide the selection of information resources. These policies and procedures are clearly stated under “Use of the Library, Procedures and Policies” on the library website. The librarians and the library director explain these policies in student orientation sessions, discipline-specific classroom presentations, one-on-one reference assistance, and focused research interviews. The library system has procedures to help enforce these policies.

### **Students**

Policies affecting students are clearly and widely available through the *GBC Catalog* which is available as a hard-copy handbook or through the website. Policies are properly focused on helping students to achieve success while guaranteeing their rights and responsibilities.

The Vice President for Student Services is the administrative officer in charge of reviewing issues of student conduct, academic performance (warnings, probation, suspension, readmission) as well as appeals or complaints. Students are informed that it is their responsibility to read and understand the information contained in the handbook.

Co-curricular activities are sponsored and promoted by student government; the policy guidelines are part of the Student Government Association Constitution.

## Human Resources

The College's policies for Human Resources are consistent with NSHE policy and Nevada state and federal law and are published on the College's website. Faculty and administration policies are contained in the *Faculty Handbook*, and are reviewed and revised as necessary. Classified employees fall under the policy umbrella of Nevada's civil service. The College works with the Nevada Department of Personnel and NSHE to keep policies and procedures current and lawful to help guide evaluation, retention, promotion, and termination. Human Resources maintains personnel records in a confidential and secure area.

## Institutional Integrity

The College represents itself clearly, accurately, and consistently in its communications, taking care to ensure that all publications and announcements are aligned with its vision and mission, and that program documents are kept current to guarantee that students move toward timely completion of degree requirements.

The College upholds ethical standards through policies and procedures to ensure fair treatment of faculty, staff, and students with appropriate processes to redress grievances, which are widely published in the catalog, the student handbook, the website, and so forth. Policy and procedures review occurs every year. Similarly, the President and delegated staff are likewise bound by policies on ethics. NSHE policy and law govern external contracts. A policy to determine various aspects of intellectual property is governed by NSHE.

The College represents its current accreditation status accurately.

## Academic Freedom

Academic freedom at the College adheres to NSHE code that outlines academic freedom and responsibility and is consistent with the American Association of University Professors' "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure" with a proper balancing of freedom with responsibility. The Preamble to the GBC Faculty Senate Bylaws further delineates this balancing of responsibility to "preserve, augment, criticize and transmit knowledge; to foster creative capacities; and to establish the opportunity for the community at large to be exposed to these functions" (*Year Seven Report*, p. 30). By implication, faculty members and students must not avoid the presentation of controversial material appropriate to the academic discipline being studied while simultaneously being obliged to present a fair set of opinions that include the learning community's academic freedoms and responsibilities. Faculty members are therefore free to pursue and communicate knowledge without fear of reprisal while also obligated to consider alternative interpretations and conclusions within the specific knowledge domain.

## Finance

NSHE oversees all budgets and policies, and GBC abides by this organizational oversight, which includes all applicable local, state, and federal regulations and laws. Fiscal policies are widely available for any interested employee or community member to review. GBC is regularly

audited by NSHE as well as external auditors to guarantee compliance. The NSHE Board of Regents Audit Committee reviews results.

## 2.B: Human Resources

Interviews with students, staff, and faculty indicated that Great Basin College personnel are competent, resourceful, and qualified. A review of hiring documents confirmed that criteria, qualifications, and procedures for selection of personnel are clearly and publicly stated. Although several job descriptions have grown over time, they appear to accurately reflect duties, responsibilities, and authority of the position.

The State of Nevada *Employee Handbook* states that state employees, including Great Basin College employees, following a probationary period “will be evaluated annually.” Interviews with employees and a random sampling of personnel files confirmed that this is not a consistent practice in all departments across the College.

Although professional development is generally limited for many employees because of reduced funding, the evaluators found evidence that Great Basin College nonetheless has implemented several creative strategies to provide faculty and staff with numerous opportunities. For example, the College sponsored a series of workshops on technology, college procedures, customer service, and active shooter safety training. Teaching and non-teaching professional faculty, while not guaranteed annual professional development, indicate that opportunities and funding exists for limited annual professional development; areas that require more because of changing policy and legal contexts, such as Human Resources or Financial Aid, for example, are prioritized. In forums and interviews it appears that classified staff have limited opportunities for professional development but have some access to on-campus and remote site internal training opportunities. In addition, many College employees, as state employees who have access to free and reduced tuition and fees as part of their employment, take courses.

Review of faculty personnel files, faculty evaluations, and input from the Student Forum confirmed that faculty members are qualified and skilled instructors who consistently provide an effective level of instruction and strong commitment to individual work with students. In forums and interviews with faculty, the Committee discovered that faculty responsibilities and workload are at an appropriate level for the College.

Great Basin College recently revamped the College faculty evaluation process and improved process, timelines, and criteria by which faculty are evaluated. Forums and individual interviews confirmed that faculty members participate in an evaluation process including feedback from the Vice President of Academic Affairs or supervising Dean, student evaluations, annual self-evaluations and on-line goal-setting exercises. A random sampling of personnel files confirmed that this process had occurred at least once in the last five years for each reviewed faculty member.

**Compliment:** Several employees have taken on additional duties to cover the workload of several positions that have been eliminated or left vacant to account for recent enrollment and budget declines. Despite budget and staffing shortages, the evaluators found Great Basin employees to have a contagious “can-do” spirit underlined by strong teamwork, support for one another and

the administrative leadership, and a strong sense of commitment to students and the mission of serving rural Nevada.

**Concern:** The committee suggests that the college implement regular annual evaluation of non-teaching professional and classified staff throughout the College.

## 2.C: Education Resources

Great Basin College (GBC) has a system in place to ensure that programs are delivered with appropriate content and rigor that is consistent with its mission. New programs are reviewed and approved by the Curriculum and Articulation Committee, Faculty Senate, and the President's Council. New programs are further reviewed by NSHE's Academic Affairs Council and ultimately approved at that level. New degrees require further approval by the NSHE Board of Regents.

The Curriculum and Articulation Committee, Faculty Senate, and administrators review new course proposals to ensure appropriate content and rigor. New courses are aligned with other NSHE institutions through a common course numbering system. Every course must clearly identify student learning outcomes on the course syllabus to receive approval.

Existing programs are reviewed every five years to ensure appropriate content and rigor. This review process is initiated with the creation of a program report by the appropriate faculty department. An external reviewer with knowledge of the content area is then brought in to read the report, visit the site of instruction, meet with faculty, and ultimately provide commendations and recommendations for the program. These reports are summarized by the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) and then provided to NSHE. The VPAA and the appropriate Dean then work with faculty to implement the recommendations that are achievable.

GBC has worked to identify expected course, program and degree learning outcomes, which are published in the college catalog and can be accessed from the website. Expected student learning outcomes for each course are provided to enrolled students on the first day of class as part of the course syllabus. The syllabus is provided in written and/or electronic form depending on the applicable instructional modality.

Credits and degrees awarded at GBC are based on documented student achievement. Qualified instructors are responsible for assessing students and assigning grades in accordance with college policies and reflect accepted learning outcomes within higher education.

The Curriculum and Articulation Committee, Faculty Senate, and the President's Council review all new degree proposals to ensure coherent design with appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, and synthesis of learning. Course outcomes are aligned to degree outcomes, though curriculum maps demonstrating this alignment have not been completed for every degree. Admissions and graduation requirements for each degree are available in the *GBC catalog*, online, on CD, and on printed degree sheets.

The faculty at GBC plays a significant role in the design, approval, implementation, and revision of the curriculum. New programs, courses and course revisions are proposed by faculty and then

ultimately approved by the Curriculum and Articulation Committee and Faculty Senate. Furthermore, faculty members engage in peer review of course syllabi as part of the annual faculty evaluation process.

The selection of new faculty at GBC is a faculty-driven process that begins with the prioritization of all requested faculty positions by the Department Chairs Committee. A recommendation is created that ranks the requested positions. Hiring committees for new faculty consist entirely of GBC faculty, though the dean may participate as an ex-officio member of the committee. The President of the College makes the final decisions regarding hiring.

All course syllabi employed at GBC include learning outcomes that are largely aligned to program and degree outcomes. These course outcomes are created and maintained by the instructional faculty, which allows them to take responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement.

Faculty at GBC work with key personnel in the library to ensure that the use of the library and online resources are integrated into the learning process. Video and instructional resources are maintained in the library in support of the Career and Technical Education programs, as requested by the instructors. Library staff members also work to support the students in finding in-house and online resources in support of research projects assigned by the faculty. Presentations on library resources and the effective searching of databases also occur in the classrooms in partnership with instructional faculty.

The efforts are demonstrated in the one-on-one sessions --“Focused Research Interview (FRI)”-- provided to students, especially for the required courses of English 101, 102, 107, and 108 classes. FRI sessions are available to any students who request it. At an interview with several English faculty members from the main campus and one from a remote site, the faculty positively affirmed that students who participated in the FRI sessions performed better than those who did not. As requested by faculty, the library provides discipline-specific presentations on library resources, services, and search strategies for using online databases to classes of various disciplines. Recent examples include agriculture, anthropology, and early childhood education. These class presentations are very popular, as seen from the dramatic growth in requests for them: From Fall 2009 to Fall 2012 they grew from 92 to 691.

Interviews and review of GBC’s policies indicate that the process for obtaining experiential credit (defined by GBC as “non-traditional credit”) is consistent with NWCCU standards. The *GBC Catalog* also outlines these procedures, including the necessary evidence to be presented as supporting documentation.

NSHE code addresses the policies and procedures for evaluating and granting transfer credit at GBC. Academic departments are asked to determine course equivalencies when uncertainty is presented in student transfer requests. Given the system-wide governance structure, the role of GBC in evaluating and granting credit is aligned well with acceptable practices outlined in the NWCCU standards. Articulation agreements with NSHE partners and other institutions have been developed and are used adequately.

The General Education component of the undergraduate programs offered at GBC demonstrates an integrated course of study. These General Education requirements meet or exceed NSHE standards and are published in the college catalog. The General Education courses for Baccalaureate degree programs and transfer associate degree programs draw from the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences and social sciences. Syllabi for all General Education courses are required to address identified outcomes in the areas of Communication Skills, Critical Thinking, Personal & Cultural Awareness, Personal Wellness, and Technological Understanding, while also aligning with program outcomes.

All General Education courses, including those required for GBC's baccalaureate degree and transfer associate degree programs have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes. These outcomes are identified with the degree requirements for these programs and are published in the college catalog. Furthermore, these outcomes, listed above, serve to support the mission of the college.

All courses taught at GBC have assessable learning outcomes identified on individual course syllabi. These course outcomes are in alignment with and support the larger program outcomes. For some programs, curriculum maps have been created to carefully demonstrate this alignment. GBC embedded some general education outcomes in the applied science program courses as part of a pilot. These embedded general education outcomes have clearly identified content that aligns with the General Education parent course and is taught by faculty who are qualified in these areas. Furthermore, the final exam questions in some of these pilots have been mapped to the General Education outcomes to further ensure alignment.

As outlined in the self-evaluation report, the GBC Continuing Education office's programs support all three Core Themes, especially Themes 2 and 3, "Build Bridges" and "Serve Rural Nevada." Programs offered serve several different populations, including high school youth (dual credit), general community members (personal enrichment, e.g. computer skills training), senior citizens, Native Americans (youth camp), and those interested in international travel (educational study tours).

Procedures for developing, marketing, and granting credit for continuing education at GBC are well documented and consistent across sites, though more programming is offered in the greater Elko area. Course scheduling and assessment are adequate and are aimed at serving the large GBC area by providing a rich set of continuing education offerings. Revenue generation opportunities might exist (especially in educational travel tours), though the need to stay focused on affordable offerings is understandable in these risk-averse times when seed money can be lost when ongoing operations dollars cannot be generated.

The Committee's review of websites and promotional materials suggests that GBC's continuing education offerings are consistent and fair. Enrollment procedures and costs are clearly indicated and, given the wide range of offerings, are quite affordable. The access to and availability of GBC continuing education offerings to those at rural centers is a real strength of the College, especially given the many competing budget demands in the current climate.



In summary, GBC Continuing Education courses are aligned with the GBC mission, especially workforce development and community service.

**Compliment:** Some programs that utilize the Canvas learning management system have developed final examinations where every question is aligned to a course outcome to ensure that student performance is based on outcome fulfillment.

**Compliment:** The evaluation committee would like to compliment GBC for embracing the integrative approach to its General Education courses to the extent that a Bachelor of Arts in Integrative Studies was subsequently developed.

## **Standard 2.D: Student Support Resources**

Great Basin College has a comprehensive array of appropriate programs and services that support student learning needs whether the student is face-to-face or in a technology-mediated environment. Interviews with students, staff, and faculty confirmed that the student services staff is skilled, committed to student success, and student-centered. A dedicated administrative staff supports these programs.

College-wide interviews confirmed that Great Basin College makes adequate provision for the safety and security of its students and employees and their property. For example, a mandatory, all-employee active shooter safety training was conducted this fall in concert with special efforts that have been made to address safety concerns at all remote centers. A physical public safety presence with dedicated staff keeps the Elko campus safe and secure. All remote centers use cameras and improved lighting to enhance safety. The Director of Environment Health oversees security, housing, and student conduct. As required under federal and state regulations, an annual report of crime statistics is published on the website. Probably the most important indicator is the student perception of safety and security, and in student forums with both Elko and remote center students, there was a universal consensus about feeling safe and that there were “no issues” with security. Current improvements include a group from student government that is working with staff to investigate an emergency notification system of e-mail and text notification.

The College has close relationships with school district personnel across the service area, working to recruit and admit students with the potential to benefit from its educational offerings. Participation in Orientation is mandatory for students to graduate, though it is not required upon matriculation. Academic advising is highly encouraged and faculty and staff alike report doing a lot of advising with students. Students who test low on the Accuplacer placement exam, or do not have a high school diploma, are referred to the ABE/GED office.

The *Year Seven Report* refers to a process of program elimination and that “students are alerted and provided a two-year time-frame and schedule of classes for completion.” The Committee did not find language regarding the program elimination process in the catalog or via the College web site. It appears that a process is in place but the Committee encourages the College to make it more accessible for employees and students.

A review of the college catalog and website confirmed that Great Basin College publishes current and accurate information that includes the institutional Mission and Core Themes, entrance requirements and procedures, grading policy, full-time faculty qualifications, tuition and fees, refund policies, financial aid resources, and the academic calendar.

Publications describing educational programs include accurate information on national and/or state legal eligibility requirements for licensure and provide clear descriptions of unique requirements for employment affiliated with those professional technical programs. Specific course requirements and degree pathways are identified in the college catalog. Licensure and other career information is offered in specific program handbooks given to students.

Staff in the Office of Admissions and Records verified that the college adheres to accepted practices regarding the secure retention of student information. Reliable and retrievable backup of student records is maintained in electronic form on a server located in Reno.

The College follows established policies and procedures, as outlined by Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), for confidentiality and release of student data. College FERPA information is readily available to students in the college catalog and on the GBC website. FERPA training is provided to Student Services staff and student workers on an individual basis through the Office of Admissions and Records. There is no evidence that regular training on FERPA regulations is provided to other staff and faculty, although it was noted that these trainings had occurred in the past.

Interviews with the college's Financial Aid Director and Assistant Director confirmed that the college administers an effective and accountable program of financial aid. The college catalog and website provide thorough information regarding the categories of financial assistance, including grants, scholarships, and loans.

Correspondence with financial aid recipients includes information on loan repayment obligations, and the College provides information on loan counseling for all financial aid students. The Financial Aid Assistant Director confirmed that the College monitors student loan programs with a default management in PeopleSoft. When the Committee asked to see the institutional default management plan, it was not available. Despite the College's relatively low default rate (just above the national average at 11.3%), the College is strongly encouraged to require the Financial Aid Office to formalize this reporting aspect of the institutional default management plan.

The college website and catalog suggest that guidelines and procedures are in place for a systematic and effective program of academic advisement to support student development and success. Staff and faculty spoke about a strong system of individual student advising that is not mandatory but highly encouraged. During a student forum with the Committee, students reported affirmative mentoring and coaching support and guidance from faculty. This is in contrast to a recent college satisfaction survey, for which 71% of respondents agreed with the statement, "The quality of academic advising is very weak." Neither staff nor faculty members in forums or interviews indicated how the system might be improved.

While both staff and faculty report providing a lot of individual student advising, there has been a decrease (one FTE position) in the Advising/Career Office staffing in recent years, and there is

not a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of academic advising for individual faculty or staff.

Although there are many resources available for students to receive advising on campus and at all remote sites (the Academic Success Center for placement assessments results and interpretation; the Admission, Advising, and Career Center for early and undecided student advising; faculty advisors for program advising; retention outreach via the College early alert system; and so forth), there is no assessment of advising efficacy. There is no data-driven approach to assessment of the advising efforts that may help improve academic advising. Since academic advising is a key component of student success the Committee encourages the College to build a more consistent practice of strong academic advising at the college.

Great Basin College supports several co-curricular clubs and activities through the Student Advocate position and members of student government. Currently, 14 clubs are available for involvement, and, impressively, student government senators reside on every campus and at every center. Many students from each campus or center participated in the student forum and expressed appreciation for the College. The College provides financial and personnel resources to student government via student fees. The student body President is a member of the President's Council and also regularly attends meetings with the State Regents as the Great Basin College student representative.

Great Basin College's sponsors two auxiliary operations, which are campus housing and the childcare center. The operations are self-supporting. In staff interviews, it was apparent that residential staff members are dedicated to the mission of housing connected to the Core Theme 3 of "Serving Rural Nevada."

The college does not sponsor any intercollegiate athletic teams but does offer several co-curricular programs and clubs. Financial operations related to co-curricular programs are consistent and receive adequate oversight despite staffing challenges.

Interviews with the professional staff member with oversight of online learning confirmed that the college ensures identity verification process for distance education students using unique and secure authentication into the learning management system and other necessary services.

**Compliment:** Consistent evidence was found in the Office of Admissions and Records that student records are being managed in a thorough and reliable way, despite the College's recent transition to a new student information system (PeopleSoft). Records appeared well organized and were found in secure and fireproof file cabinets. A handbook on records management using PeopleSoft had been created to guide staff through new processes. The office was adequately staffed with full-time professionals that confirmed being cross-trained to consistently cover the College workload providing a strong, centralized records management system for the College.

**Compliment:** Several staff members support co-curricular student involvement and campus life despite their many other job responsibilities. Many students (in Elko and from remote locations) participated in the student forum and were actively supportive of the College. The Committee

compliments the College on continuing a creative commitment to student life, despite budget shortfalls and many competing priorities.

**Concern:** Orientation is not required when a student is new to the College and is only required before graduation. The evaluators encourage the College to consider requiring Orientation before new students begin classes.

## **Standard 2.E: Library and Information Resources**

GBC students and faculty have access to almost 150,000 e-books and over 60 online databases covering a wide range of subjects to support instructional programs offered at the college's main campus and remote sites. These electronic resources are accessible 24/7 via the library website. The databases include a variety of content formats, such as periodicals, journals, encyclopedias, newspapers, documents, reference books, photographs, and charts. Some databases are for specific subjects and disciplines. The library has more than 66,000 print materials and about 1,800 audio-visual items on the main campus that are available for loan to students at the campus centers. Of the 150,000 e-books, about 30,000 titles are searchable in the library catalog. The library director and the librarians serve as liaisons to programs and departments for collection development purpose.

The library uses various approaches to solicit input for planning from the college community. The Library Committee of the Faculty Senate provides input and recommendations regarding the functions and operation of the library. Two examples are the decision on reducing the library hours because of budget cut and the expansion of e-books to support curricula. Through the library website, faculty can use a form to suggest collection titles, and the college community can submit comments and suggestions on any aspects of the library operation.

Student and faculty surveys are another method the GBC library uses to obtain feedback relating to usage, satisfaction, and availability of library services. The spring 2012 student survey results show high ratings of library services at the level of good or outstanding, although 23 percent of students indicated that they never used the library. Students who attended the student forum expressed positive comments regarding the library.

The GBC library's instructional efforts and support for student learning are delivered in several ways. At the student orientations prior to the beginning of each semester, the library introduces various library services available to students--library cards, the library website, and information resources. The focused research interviews (FRI), as explained earlier, directly support students' research of information resources for their class assignments. The discipline-specific presentations to classes help students learn the resources in their respective subjects more deeply. Librarians and the director use phone and email to assist students in online classes and at remote sites. They also travel to the campus centers to provide in-person library instruction.

A "Faculty Resources" page is available on the library website for faculty to communicate their requests for instructional support. Librarians provide "in-service" training sessions to faculty and staff, introducing new resources and services before each semester starts and at monthly Faculty Senate meetings.

In addition to surveying faculty and students to find out their library needs, usage, and satisfaction, the GBC library evaluates the quality and adequacy of library service and information resources through communication with programs and departments whose faculty and students use the library and its resources. For local resources, the library regularly tracks and analyzes the circulation data and usage statistics of library website, e-books, and databases for appropriate resource selection and collection development.

The library broadens and expands resources to support instructional programs by collaborating with other institutions in sharing a union catalog with the University of Nevada, Reno, and statewide databases with the Nevada State Library and Archives. There is no other information resource sharing between the GBC library and other NSHE libraries other than interlibrary loan of print materials, which struck the Committee as perhaps a missed opportunity.

To align with the college's standard Internet security policy, the library applies the method of frequent and regular changes of library passwords to assure all library computer resources from any security problems. Through user authentication, access to online resources is limited to GBC students, faculty, staff, and other authorized users; hence preventing the resources from access by non-authorized users as required by online database contract agreements.

**Compliment:** Students and faculty in general have high praises for the library. They value and appreciate the library staff's outstanding helpful service attitude and their willingness to do anything requested.

**Compliment:** There is obvious collaboration and mutual support of each other among the library staff in support of student learning and faculty's teaching efforts.

**Concern:** Information Literacy (IL) is part of the library's mission. The Committee encourages the Library to create an "Information Literacy Plan" with intentional strategies to promote IL across the curriculum and benchmarks for assessment of achievement.

**Concern:** As indicated by faculty, the current library website is difficult to navigate. The Committee encourages a redesign of the library website with input from students and faculty for easy and efficient access to information, effective and meaningful organization of contents and links for more helpful information access for students and faculty.

**Concern:** Faculty members from baccalaureate programs have expressed the lack of adequate and current information resources to support their teaching and student learning with some expressing their desire for more current resources. The Committee is concerned that the library has not provided appropriate level of information resources to support bachelor degree level courses.

## Financial Resources

The State of Nevada General Fund is GBC's primary source of revenue. Financial planning is a reflection of the allocation process from the NSHE Board of Regents, which is responsible for allocations to the system colleges, as well as the approval of all fees. The college is also required to submit for approval all self-supporting budgets over \$25,000 annually. The college's financial

planning includes all sources of funds within the context of the state system. The only current debt obligation is for student housing, which is financially solvent with revenues that cover all expenses, including the debt payments. The President and other staff work closely with the Board of Regents to stay informed and to influence as much as possible the financial planning done at the NSHE system level.

The college has sufficient cash and reserves to ensure short-term solvency and are within the restrictions of NSHE. The college is facing a major shift from enrollment-based allocations to allocations based on student credit-hour completion. It is uncertain how this shift in allocation will be implemented and how quickly the college will need to adapt to reduced resources. The President formed the Budget Task Force, which is conducting scenario planning to prepare for reduced funding with a focus on student mix and strategies for new revenue.

Faculty and staff are thoughtful and creative in the utilization of resources; they seek opportunities to share services with other organizations, find grants and donations to serve and create programs, and work together to carefully allocate and expend money based on mission and priorities.

Policy 4.2 clearly defines how budgeting is completed and monitored for the college, in compliance with requirements of the NSHE Board of Regents and Policies. The college budget is transparent, with information available for anyone wanting to view it. The Faculty Senate's Budget and Facilities Committee plays a role in making recommendations to the President's Council relating to equipment and facility project requests. The President, utilizing the President's Council, makes final decisions relating to budget. Recently, the President formed the Budget Task Force, with a broad representation of constituents, to help the college plan for budget reductions imposed by the legislature and those that will result from the change in the NSHE allocation model.

The College financial systems follow Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and a clear system of internal controls. The college regularly tests those internal controls in high-risk areas, such as cash collection at all sites. The financial system is an older "green screen" system that will be replaced in the near future. The VPBA is participating in Phase Two of the iNtegrate project, looking to replace the current administrative system.

The college receives funding for small capital improvements through student fees for buildings. The list of projects are based on age and conditions of the buildings, project requests made by faculty and staff through the Budget and Facilities committee, and the need to address life safety and accessibility issues. The college's master plan describes major capital projects. There is currently no state funding available for major capital projects. There is only one source of debt for student housing, which is paid from revenues from that operation. All debt is subject to approval by the NSHE Board of Regents.

The college has two auxiliary enterprises: student housing and the Mark H. Dawson Child and Family Center. Both are in good financial standing and are able to generate revenue sufficient to cover both operating expenses and necessary capital improvements. Each of the auxiliary

enterprise operations fulfills an important need for the students and supports the College's Mission and Core Themes.

The college is audited annually as part of the consolidated financial statements for NSHE. External auditors visit the campus and some of the centers to complete their work. The financial statements are published annually and include financial information for the system as a whole and in detail by college. The financials and audit report also include results for the Foundation, which is a related entity. The audit reports are reviewed and approved by the Board of Regents. The college has no findings or management letter items outstanding.

The Great Basin College Foundation is responsible for all fundraising conducted on behalf of the college. The Chief Development Officer reports to the President and is the Executive Director of the Foundation Board of Trustees. The Memorandum of Understanding creates clear expectations for both the College and the Foundation and is reviewed and updated regularly. The Foundation operates in accordance with all state and federal requirements and has established policies and procedures. An annual audit is conducted and reported to the Board of Regents and is included in the annual statewide audit report, as noted above. The Foundation has played a key and successful role in providing scholarships for students and creating capital funds in support of the college's master plan.

## **Physical and Technological Infrastructure**

The College's buildings and grounds reflect the pride people demonstrate in serving students and the community; each site looks welcoming, well cared for, and reflective of the quality programs and services offered. Educational programs are offered via four regional centers in Elko, Winnemucca, Ely, and Pahrump, and in 15 satellite centers scattered throughout their 62,000 square mile district.

The buildings were constructed from 1973 to 2010, with a majority of the facilities built after 1997. The buildings are in good condition with only \$3.4 million dollars in minor repairs identified in the Facilities Project Status report. Building and Grounds staff utilize an electronic work order system to track current and deferred maintenance projects. Projects are reviewed monthly to prioritize and allocate resources; life safety and accessibility projects receive the highest priority.

Funding for capital improvements come from a variety of sources, including auxiliary service fees, student fees, foundation funds, grant funds, and the state Higher Education Capital construction funds. The Buildings and Grounds Manager maintains the Facilities Project Status report with regular review by the Vice President for Business Affairs. Ideas for improvement projects are brought forth to the Faculty Senate's Budget and Facilities Committee with recommendations going to President's Council.

The property report to NSHE, completed every two years, identifies the need to acquire additional property and land that may be available for future expansion of the Elko and Pahrump campuses.

Policy 4.20, published on the website, addresses the College's Environmental Health and Safety programs. At the beginning of each semester, instructors include an orientation of health and safety protocols for their students. The college utilizes an electronic chemical inventory system developed by University of Nevada, Las Vegas that enables them to upload their hazardous chemical information and maintain required MSDS information. They contract disposal of hazardous materials to a local company. All requests for disposal services are coordinated through the Director of Environmental Health, Safety and Security. Faculty and staff from all sites work proactively with the safety committee and Director to improve and communicate safety procedures. For example, the Director is invited to lectures in order to evaluate and provide feedback on safety orientation to students. The safety committee meets monthly with good participation from the variety of disciplines across the campuses.

The existing master plan is dated from July 2004 - 2012 and beyond, which loosely aligns with the strategic plan. The college has accomplished many of the projects identified in the current master plan; the new buildings and renovations have provided the necessary space and technology to support and expand educational programs that support the college's mission and core themes. With the state's budget challenges, it is anticipated that capital funds will not be available for new projects in the near future. The college is scheduled to submit a new master plan to the NSHE Board of Regents within the next two years, which aligns with the anticipated availability of capital funds.

The college accumulates funds for equipment from a variety of sources, including a Technology Fee and General Improvement Fee from all students, from various specific class fees, from line item budgets for operational areas, and from grants and donations. The Budget and Facilities Committee manages the distribution of a majority of the general fees by reviewing requests from operational units of the college, prioritizing the requests based on strategic goals for the areas and recommending the allocation of funds to the President's Council. Specific areas utilize other equipment funds. With one exception, faculty and staff were satisfied with the equipment and technology they needed to perform successfully. The college demonstrates careful consideration for how equipment resources are allocated; the system is described as fair and relevant to the strategic goals for each department. If something is not funded in one year, it will most likely be funded in the next if the item meets the appropriate criteria.

### **Technological Infrastructure**

According to the *Year Seven Report*, "Utilization of technology is fundamental to GBC accomplishing its Mission and Core Themes to provide student enrichment across its rural Nevada service area." This fundamental use of technology was readily apparent to the evaluation team, as was the fact that GBC use of technology is exemplary. The faculty and staff have created a dynamic and effective learning community for all students, both on-line and face-to-face. Equally impressive is how all of these many sites are connected on a management and operational level, creating a very cohesive institution.

Despite a decline in resources over the past several years, support for the use of technology appears to be effective. The academic programs are supported by a number of key staff including a Director of On-Line Education, a Coordinator of Classroom Technology, and a



Webmaster. Scattered throughout the sites are facilitators, largely student employees, to support faculty with IAV technology. Faculty members were very positive about the support they receive to deliver curriculum, reporting in numerous ways that the staff are very responsive in getting them the tools they need. The Director and Coordinator try to be very proactive in serving the faculty and students, whether by sending out weekly tips and information to faculty or through quick response to the changing demands created by new tools and technology.

The infrastructure for technology is served by a team of computer services staff that manages the software and hardware supporting college operations. The college is also served by NSHE's System Computing Services, which coordinates administrative and network systems for all the public colleges and universities in the state. Examples of this are the PeopleSoft student information system and the statewide data network. GBC staff members participate in statewide planning for technology. The college hosts offices for system employees who manage the data network for the region.

Staff and faculty receive training in variety of ways, from direct instruction and orientation to trainings conducted by super users qualified to help others. Staff and faculty also take courses to improve their knowledge and skills. Training is also provided for faculty during in-service sessions at the beginning of semesters and throughout the academic year. Faculty members are required to attend two online course workshops before teaching online.

Students are supported for their online education through WebCampus Orientation, which provides instruction for how to navigate the Learning Management System, tips on how to be successful, and introduction to online access to the library and tutoring services. The open computing areas are located at multiple sites, where lab aides can provide information and support to students face-to-face.

While most faculty members were happy with the technology support they receive, there were some concerns expressed about training for new software and equipment. The thinning of resources may be creating challenges for keeping up with training for staff and faculty. It did appear that some training was hit and miss, perhaps reflective of the many hats people wear and their diminished capacity to attend training when offered.

Infrastructure planning for technology occurs at both NSHE and local levels. GBC staff members participate in system planning through taking part in bid and selection processes, and being members of system wide task forces and committees. Locally, the departmental strategic plans identify needs for technology and are either requested through the Budget and Facilities Committee equipment process or carried out through the use of operating budget or course fees. Computing Services works with other departments on campus to plan and implement infrastructure and hardware needed to support the college functions.

No formal planning is readily apparent, though the various constituencies work well together through informal processes and through the allocation of resources. There is a Technology Group that is assembled when discussing college wide initiatives; for example this group met a year ago to make a decision on changing to a new email platform. Currently, the college relies heavily upon individuals and the small size of the institution for planning and carrying out

technology initiatives. The evaluators believe the college could benefit from a more formal planning process to avoid unintentional challenges, to ensure that a long view is incorporated into planning, and to best utilize resources for the technology this college relies upon so heavily.

Computing Services support over 1,100 computers at all college sites. Student labs receive the first priority for the newest computers, then classrooms and then staff offices. The equipment budget provides a steady resource for replacing computers.

The Computing Services operation has a detailed strategic plan with two goals: update technology systems as needed and as affordable, and obtain resources in order to accomplish the department's mission. It is not clear how this operation is working with other departments at the college to ensure they are successful in implementing their strategic plan, nor is it clear how decisions across campus impact their strategic plan.

The college's five-year replacement plan is hampered by the increase in computers purchased over the past five years. This has strained the ability to stay on schedule with replacing computers. There is a plan for replacing switches and routers, but it is dependent upon resources that become available through staff vacancies or other savings.

The Computing Services has a good team, with good customer/end user relations. They are also challenged with a lack of planning time or the ability to effectively coordinate services among the different departments.

## Standards 3 & 4: Planning and Implementation; Effectiveness and Improvement

### 3.A Institutional Planning

GBC has a strategic plan that the Regents approved for the years from 2009 to 2016. The plan uses the metaphor of frames within frames to conceptualize its approach. The first frame includes the institution as a whole; the second contains departments and programs; the third focuses on student learning inside programs; and the fourth is a tactical level the plan has labeled “the trenches” (GBC Strategic Plan 2009-2016, pp. 3-6). The College is making progress on appropriate analysis, assessment, and improvement activities, as evidenced in two different areas that the plan offers as examples, Business and Student Services, which have developed plans for their areas.

Generally, the planning mindset that necessarily moves through a cycle of data collection followed by analysis and assessment that leads to improvement actions is increasingly part of the campus culture. The strategic plan, which grapples with the development of the College’s Core Themes, is clearly benefiting from the Commission’s new emphasis on analysis rather than description, on results rather than intentions. In particular, the relatively new President brings with him an extensive background in continuous improvement management and is one of many reasons the Chancellor commented that President Curtis is “doing a bang-up job” and is clearly “the right person at the right time for GBC.”

A way to describe this planning context and the Committee’s empathetic recommendation is found in a core idea of complexity science, which describes three kinds of system landscapes. First, a “Mt. Fuji landscape” is a *simple* system that solves its problems with a simple co-variant efficiency that creates a rising performance curve marked by a beautifully proportional diminishing return line. Second, a rugged landscape is a *complicated* system with numerous non-Fuji peaks and valleys that most organizations intuitively understand as the best metaphor for them. Here there are different peaks and valleys that are being endlessly explored and exploited without an end in sight. Third, a shaking landscape is a *complex* system where the rugged landscape is chaotically changing during seismic and volcanic change, where a part of the organization is at elevation one moment then suddenly underwater the next. At the NSHE system perspective, the planning environment for GBC is *complicated*; from the GBC perspective, it is *complex* because local leaders are not able to control the effects of the NSHE allocation model changes on the College.

As a result, the Chancellor and Regents have grappled not only with the question of whether the new model is equitable (i.e., distributing resources evenly to the Nevada higher education population) but also, in Regent Melcher’s phraseology, is the new allocation model “right and fair?” Again, these are Nevada’s critical questions to answer, not the Committee’s, but the context has created a GBC feeling that long-term planning has limited use. In the words of one GBC administrator, “I’m afraid to be too strategic” because revenues are so uncertain. If, for example, the College was to pursue a two-year start-up funding from the mining industry for a new program or position, it seems likely that the program would have to close or the person laid-off at the end of the start-up phase because the resources for sustainability are not likely to be

there. Another example illustrates the feeling of futility about growth for GBC. Basically, if the economy continues to stagnate statewide, then the available dollars for higher education funding will likely remain constant even though the weighted credit hours in the new allocation system will grow, which means each new credit hour will be worth fewer dollars. The new model is predicted to cause a fluctuation of five to eight percent per year, so the strategic vision right now is simple survival until the earthquakes stop. As a mid-level administrator put it, a current “inability to plan long-term and think bigger and better” hampers the College. “There are things we would love to do but we don’t have the money to do. It is hard to dream and have that vision for bigger and better when you are in budget survival mode. It is frustrating because we could be doing more but our hands are tied, so it is difficult.”

The Committee felt that much of the planning activity right now might be described as inductive data gathering that has forestalled analysis and formulation of action steps because of this uncertainty. Consequently, the Committee did not leave the College with concerns that GBC institutional planning is out of compliance; rather, the Committee wishes to express its concern for the College’s predicament over an uncertain funding future and encourages the College to continue progress in its formal planning processes to improve stability and predictability for the multiple scenarios that are being discussed internally at the College and at the NSHE level. The Committee recommends that the College continue to align strategic planning with current environmental trends to ensure sustainability (3.A.1; 3.A.3; 5.B.3).

The preparation for multiple futures through scenario planning will most likely benefit the College in a very practical way; when one or more of these futures does arrive, a plan will be in place, so in addition to the Recommendation, the Committee also wishes to compliment the College for the proactive steps it has taken so far.

### **3.B Core Theme Planning; 4.A Assessment; and 4.B Improvement**

#### **Core Theme 1: Provide Student Enrichment**

Core Theme 1, “Provide Student Enrichment,” is defined by GBC as, “*From the student perspective, functions of the college directed toward personal enrichment and success are available, sufficient and effective.*” This theme is broken down into three discrete objectives: (a) Provide Educational Opportunities; (b) Foster Cultural Awareness; and (c) Provide Curricula and Programs for Careers.

In addressing the first objective to Provide Educational Opportunities, GBC provides a range of academic programs to students in its extensive service area. The college offers Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, and Associate of General Studies degrees. It also offers Associate of Applied Science degrees in 12 majors and Certificates of Achievement in 16 areas of emphasis. Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Bachelor of Applied Science degrees are also available. In part, GBC defines successful attainment of this objective by measuring the degree to which the college is able to help students meet their self-identified education goals.

The second objective, Foster Cultural Awareness, addresses the honoring of diverse cultures while fostering an appreciation of the arts. GBC recognizes that students in its rural service area may have limited exposure to diversity within local populations. Furthermore, the primary

centers for the arts are located in the larger population centers, too far from the GBC service area to allow reasonable access. In part, GBC defines successful attainment of this objective by measuring the changing demographics within the service area and the number of cultural experiences that are provided to its students.

The final objective, to Provide Curricula and Programs for Careers focuses on career related degrees and certificates that are critical for students that are seeking a new career, are looking to sustain their current career or those that wish to advance through continuing education. GBC works well with local employers to identify the knowledge and skills required in the workforce community. In part, the college defines successful attainment of this objective through the number of career-directed degrees and certificates that are offered as well as job placement and student satisfaction.

Taken as a whole, the elements of Core Theme 1, Provide Student Enrichment, address and encompass essential elements of the college's mission, though the Committee encourages the College to continue to refine its indicators. For example, and as was noted earlier, it is unclear to the Committee how the demographics of a given area might be indicators of cultural awareness that the College can reasonably be expected to positively affect in a cycle of continuous improvement.

## **Core Theme 2: Build Bridges**

Core Theme 2, "Build Bridges," is defined by GBC as, "*Seek, develop and maintain partnerships with entities external to GBC as appropriate to fulfill the GBC mission.*" Three objectives are incorporated into this core theme: facilitate seamless transfer of students, build/sustain credit programs, and support community needs.

Objective 1, to facilitate seamless transfer of students between high school, community college and universities, is aligned well with the college mission. The indicators of this objective attempt to reflect GBC's ability to help enhance successful academic transitions for students. For instance, increasing success rates of students enrolling in developmental English and math suggest that there is improved alignment with K-12 partners and a heightened (and data-informed) emphasis on improving college readiness. Interviews with the Institutional Research director and Assessment Committee chair indicate a focus on improving these success rates. GBC's Tech Prep programs and dual credit opportunities for local high school students add to the educational options in Elko and the larger GBC service area.

Building and sustaining career programs, Objective 2, is evident in the business and industry partnerships at GBC. The Maintenance Training Cooperative (MTC), a collaborative venture between the mining industry and GBC, is particularly strong given the regional economy's link to gold mining. Campus interviews and documents supported the strength of the connection between GBC and the mining industry. Mining companies rely on GBC-trained workers to drive this crucial regional economic engine. Also, as a longstanding example of the college meeting local and regional workforce, many interviewees cited the College's very strong nursing program. Baccalaureate degree programs also add to the range of programs offered in order to meet industry and workforce demands.

Objective 3, supporting community needs, seems to fit well within the Building Bridges core theme. Continuing education and other partnerships indicate a solid connection between GBC and the communities it serves. While it is unclear whether the indicators truly assess the impact of GBC's extensive community education programming, the interdependence of GBC and Elko emerged in interviews and supporting documents.

As outlined above, the cohesive relationships among education partners, business, industry, continuing education and small business development support the importance of the Building Bridges core theme in the overall GBC mission. The Committee encourages the College to continue to build metrics that more precisely gather data to assess the objectives so that the cycle of planning, assessment, and continuous improvement can continue to move this theme forward.

### **Core Theme 3: Serve Rural Nevada**

Core Theme 3, "Serve Rural Nevada," describes the very heart of the college. This core theme identifies how the college sees itself, how the students view the college, and expresses the College's main challenge about how to deliver academic programs and support services to a 62,000 square-mile district: "To fulfill a fundamental element of its mission, GBC delivers all of its commitments and services throughout its six-county service area as well as resources will pragmatically allow. This extends beyond the main campus, providing for the needs of place-bound residents with appropriate accessibility through local and distance delivery methods." Core Theme 3, "Serve Rural Nevada," aligns with and supports the GBC mission statement.

To serve its huge service region of 62,000 square miles containing approximately fifteen percent of the population of Nevada, GBC has developed an intricate and sophisticated mechanism of distance education. The Committee witnessed everywhere the high level of integration of the main campus with all distance sites and an impressive lack of barriers with distance technology. Faculty, staff, and student forums included participants from all of the distance sites via IAV, in addition to evaluator meetings with campus committees and interviews with staff at remote locations. The process was both seamless and flawless and demonstrated for the Committee that this is the way of doing business and education for students and employees of GBC.

Three objectives are incorporated into this Core Theme. The College is expected to provide (a) education to distant locations; (b) resources to meet educational needs of the service area; and (c) needed services to students at all GBC sites. These objectives align with the Core Theme and the college Mission. These objectives are all to "provide" education, resources, and services. The Committee noted that the word "provide" emphasizes inputs rather than outputs and that these objectives do not address the quality of what is provided nor do they assess the success of students in rural Nevada, even though several of the supporting indicators do support quality and success.

These three objectives support the programs and services in Core Theme 3, but the College is still in the initial stages of articulating which programs and services support the Core Theme and in what specific ways. The Committee discovered through faculty and staff interviews that many programs and services support this Core Theme but could not find written evidence to document the alignment of programs and services with the Core Theme. Objectives 3.1 and 3.2 each list six indicators of achievement, and Objective 3.3 lists three indicators of achievement. These

indicators range from opportunities to outcomes. Although the indicators are assessable and verifiable, several indicators appear to be environmental scan data rather than designed to use the measureable results in order to make change, which could then be reassessed to see if the indicator moved. Since continuous improvement has generically been stated for the acceptable threshold for all indicators of all objectives, yet has not been defined for each indicator, it is unclear how several of the indicators—for example, demographic data—will be used. If certain segments of the service population are desired to increase, those targets will naturally require other segments to decrease in the current zero sum game fiscal environment. Some remote location directors discussed utilizing demographic data—as a marketing tool to ensure no population groups are being lost as well as to target which classes to offer in academic programming or community education, for example—but other directors were unsure of how they might use the data.

As such, it was unclear to the Committee how assessment of the indicators will be used to continuously improve the overall goal of the Core Theme. Continuous improvement compared to baseline data is presented as the intended use of the indicators, but specific rationale and details are not provided. For example, Indicator 1 (number of programs fully available online) and Indicator 2 (number of class sections in online and IAV distance education) must increase each year in order to meet the goal. It is unclear how simply increasing the number will provide a strategic pathway to serve rural Nevada. Likewise, staffing numbers and facilities have been chosen as indicators of providing sufficient resources rather than analyzing how the alignment of those services and budget allocation processes will support fulfillment of the objectives and core theme.

Meaningful indicators for serving rural Nevada such as course success rates, grade distribution, completion rates, retention rates, and student satisfaction ratings split out by satellite campus and online audience do not intuitively align with the objectives of “providing” education, resources and services to students. Rather, these metrics seem to support the idea of quality and success rather than to “provide,” and the Committee encourages the College in its deliberation about whether access in the form of provision of services, or success in the form of student achievement and community enrichment, is the essential purpose of Core Theme 3.

**Compliment:** The quality, capability, and spirit of GBC’s service to their large service region are impressive, and are evident in every conversation with students, staff, and faculty at GBC.

## **Standard Five: Mission Fulfillment, Monitoring, Adaptation, Sustainability**

### **Mission Fulfillment**

As with many institutions on a fast track through the new accreditation process, GBC has learned a great deal that will form the basis for its future self-reflection and continuous improvement. GBC is also in a unique position of needing to adapt to a future that has not yet been fully clarified, though some measure of downsizing of its efforts is likely because of the shifting in the state’s allocation model. The process of compressing a seven-year cycle into a two-year period has revealed some gaps that no doubt will be filled in over the next full cycle. The Committee

compliments the College for the work it has done in laying the foundation for future success while under the strain of tight timelines and difficult financial planning during an abbreviated cycle.

GBC's mission is clearly being fulfilled. The students the Committee spoke with are clearly having their lives enriched; the transitions from high schools through GBC to the workforce or to NSHE or institutions of higher education are occurring at a higher rate than other NSHE colleges; the service to rural Nevada, through asynchronous e-learning technologies and synchronous Interactive Audio-Visual that are supported by on-site faculty and staff who are caring and responsive to their students' learning needs, is impressive.

However, the Committee did not find a clear definition of mission fulfillment at an acceptable threshold. And, while the Core Themes are clearly aligned with the College Mission, the indicators of achievement of those Core Themes, in spite of ample evidence that the College is indeed doing a superb job serving its community, are in some cases, in the opinion of the Committee, not indicative of that achievement. The Committee, upon conclusion of its visit, felt strongly that GBC is meeting its mission quite well but that sometimes the wrong things are being counted.

The Committee feels certain that improved metrics will bring greater clarity to mission fulfillment efforts, integrating the processes of planning, assessment, and continuous improvement, especially once the College develops an acceptable level of mission fulfillment that is annually affirmed. In true peer-review spirit, the Committee offers these insights while commending the strong spirit of continuous improvement that characterizes the College, which will continue to spur efforts to align the Mission, Core Themes, Objectives, and Indicators that provide the metrics to roll up into an acceptable level of mission fulfillment as previously mentioned in Recommendation One on page 9 of this report.

## **Adaptation and Sustainability**

Publicly funded higher education in the United States, as we all know too well, is at a crossroads as legislatures make critical decisions that continue to conceive of higher education as a private rather than public good. In many states, the costs are shifted from public investment in human capital to private expense to the individual student and family.

Within this context, Nevada is in good shape on the consumer side of the equation because the costs of higher education are still relatively low for the student. The Chancellor, the Regents, and the President of GBC, in surveying the internal and external environments, see disruptive change coming to Nevada and to GBC. As GBC's budget fluctuates, the College may need to plan in shorter cycles than the seven-year one used for the 2009-2016 time frame until revenues stabilize to the point where longer planning loops are possible.

In terms of Standard 5.B, the College administration, faculty, and staff are very conscious of the situation within which they are operating and exemplify the principles of adaptability. Resilience, which is not explicitly addressed in the language of Standard 5.B, is nonetheless a fundamental building block of sustainability. The College may need to change certain aspects of the scope of its mission if the worst happens, but the Committee is confident that there are no



issues of long-term sustainability because the people and culture of the institution are hardy and approach the future with grit and optimism for their students while regularly evaluating the resources and capacity for mission fulfillment.

By recognizing the risks to its funding the College has established the fundamental mindset for adaptation and sustainability by realizing that resources are ever more scarce and that College must proactively shape its own destiny rather than have external forces entirely determine its fate.

## Summary

The Committee for the on-site peer review of GBC's *Year Seven Report* commends the administration, faculty, staff, and students for their embrace of the new accreditation model and their willingness to work on a shortened time frame to accomplish the *Year Seven Report*. The Committee discovered broad support, high regard, and great enthusiasm for the College's mission everywhere we looked across the expanse of 62,000 square miles of sparsely developed rural Nevada. In fulfilling its mission of service through education opportunities, GBC is clearly making a difference in the life of its community and the lives of its students.

## **Commendations and Recommendations**

### **Recommendation One: Mission Fulfillment**

While the College has done excellent work to revise the conceptual framework that provides improved congruence between its mission and core themes, the Committee recommends that the College continue this work by developing a definition of Mission Fulfillment that identifies achievement at an acceptable threshold in measurable terms. (Standard 1.A.2)

### **Recommendation Two: Core Theme Planning**

The Committee recommends that the College continue to refine its success indicators for improved alignment with core theme objectives so that subsequent planning, assessment, and improvement activities are meaningfully developed over the seven-year cycle. (1.B.2; 3.B; 4.A; 4.B)

### **Recommendation Three: Institutional Planning**

The College is encouraged to continue progress in its formal planning processes to improve stability and predictability for multiple scenarios. The Committee recommends that the College continue to align strategic planning with current environmental trends to ensure sustainability. (3.A.1; 3.A.3; 5.B.3)

### **Commendation**

The Committee commends the culture of collegiality at Great Basin College. All members of the evaluation team noted the resilience and spirit of teamwork among faculty and staff at all levels. Despite being stretched thin, the hard-working GBC employees exhibit a remarkable commitment to serving students and their community.

### **Commendation**

The Committee commends the leadership at all levels for the courage, empathy, and perspective needed to effectively solve the historic challenges facing the College.

### **Commendation**

The College's use of technology to serve students throughout rural Nevada is truly remarkable and is exemplary at a national level. Student engagement flourishes in IAV classes and co-curricular activities where students, faculty, and staff create active learning environments that enable students to thrive and achieve beyond what they imagine possible.

## **Commendation**

The College's buildings and grounds reflect the pride that the facilities staff demonstrate in serving students and the community; each site is welcoming, well cared for, and reflective of the quality programs and services offered.

## **Commendation**

The College demonstrates commendable financial agility. Faculty and staff are thoughtful and creative in the utilization of resources; they seek opportunities to share services with other organizations, find grants and donations to serve and create programs, and work together to carefully allocate and expend money based on mission and priorities.