

Year 7 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (Y7EIE)
Peer-Evaluation Report

Great Basin College

Elko, NV

September 28-30, 2020

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

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I. Evaluation Committee

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II. Introduction

A five-person evaluation team conducted a Year Seven Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) visit to Great Basin College from September 28-30, 2020. The visit covered Standards One and Two in response to the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report submitted by the College to the Commission on February 13, 2020.

III. Assessment of Self-Evaluation and Support Materials

Great Basin College provided the evaluators with a report addressing both standards, college catalog, copies of third party notifications, class schedule, and report addendum. Due to the original timing of the visit, the college completed its report prior to the NWCCU finalizing and disseminating an updated handbook to accompany the 2020 standards. As a result, the college had to create the report with minimal guidance and it varies somewhat from the guidance provided in NWCCU updated handbook. The report addressed each of the standard elements but in some cases the evaluators felt that more detailed information would have been helpful. During the visit, the college promptly provided additional materials as requested by evaluators.

IV. Visit Summary

The evaluation team met with a variety of college constituents. The visit included open forums for faculty, classified staff, and students. Additionally, members of the evaluating team met with members of the Nevada Board of Regents, the Chancellor for the Nevada System of Higher Education, Great Basin College President, deans, department chairs, campus directors, and staff from departments including student services, human resources, business office, institutional research, library, technology, and distance learning. The evaluators also met with representatives from student government, the faculty senate, and community members. Great Basin College staff were collegial, frank, and very accommodating, which resulted in a smooth and informative visit. The evaluating team were impressed with the support college employees provided each other and their dedication to the college mission.

V. Standard 1: Student Success and Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

a. Standard 1.A: Institutional Mission

i. 1.A.1 Meets NWCCU standard

The GBC mission and core themes encapsulate the college's educational purpose and commitments. The college's core themes express the college's commitment to student learning and achievement and its unique focus on serving rural areas of the state.

b. Standard 1.B: Improving Institutional Effectiveness

i. 1.B.1

The evaluators did not see evidence that the college is engaged in an ongoing or systematic planning process. While the college has a strategic plan, supports and has reported on the five Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) strategic goals, and developed a Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) plan, it does not have a process for regularly evaluating its progress in meeting institutional goals. Such a process would conclude with a determination about the extent to which the college is meeting its mission, guide efforts to accomplish the college's goals and objectives, inform the allocation of resources, and be driven by data derived from a set of indicators.

ii. 1.B.2

In the current strategic plan, Great Basin College lists 39 key performance indicators. However, the college is not tracking or measuring them on a regular or consistent basis. In fact, college staff recognize there are difficulties with measuring some of the indicators. NSHE has identified a set of indicators supporting five strategic goals with which all colleges and universities in the state are expected to align their strategic work. Additionally, the NSHE website lists data from peer institutions both within the state as well as national peer institutions. GBC staff stated an intention to include data from additional peer institutions in the college's planning process. The GBC Institutional Research office has also built additional dashboards for college use. When speaking with evaluators, college leaders referenced both NSHE and institutional data. However, the college has not identified a discrete set of measurable indicators to use in evaluating the college's progress in meeting its mission. Furthermore, the college has not defined mission fulfillment for itself, nor a process for determining mission fulfillment. Identifying a set of indicators that can help the college evaluate its progress in achieving its goals and fulfilling its mission, is a foundational component of an ongoing and systematic planning process.

Compliment #1: The Office of Institutional Research and senior administrators have put forth a great deal of effort to disseminate data and educate the college community about how to use data.

iii. 1.B.3

In meetings with students, there was some evidence that the college's planning and resource allocation processes included limited student involvement. Students have a voice in fee increases and some items that directly relate to them. Faculty and staff had some involvement with the development of the SEM plan. College

leadership stated an intent to include students, faculty, and classified staff in the upcoming strategic planning effort.

It was unclear how the college would embed student, faculty, and staff participation and input into an ongoing and systematic institutional planning and evaluation process.

iv. 1.B.4

The college monitors its external environment through a variety of community engagement strategies including an Institutional Advisory Board, formal partnerships with public and higher education institutions, collaborations with business and industry, as well as employee involvement in community organizations.

The college monitors its internal environment through shared governance structures with employees and students, student surveys, and intentional communication strategies.

The college uses feedback from monitoring its internal and external environments to make decisions such as starting new programs, implementing an advising strategy, and implementing student fees.

The college is currently planning to begin a strategic planning process that will incorporate information about its internal and external environments.

The lack of an ongoing and systematic process and indicators for evaluating institutional effectiveness limit the college's ability to fully incorporate information about its internal and external environments into its planning process.

Compliment #2: The college has developed remarkable external partnerships with public school districts and the University of Nevada, Reno.

c. Standard 1.C: Student Learning

i. 1.C.1 Meets NWCCU standard

Career technical programs represent local employers and students as well as faculty and meet regularly to review curriculum. A transfer coordinator ensures that transfer courses are transferable to local transfer destinations, as does the NSHE common course numbering. Program review is thorough and conducted regularly with external evaluators.

Compliment #3: The college has developed a clear and focused 30-credit curriculum for dually enrolled high school students.

ii. 1.C.2

Student learning outcomes are not always common across all sections of the same course and are not explicitly tied to program outcomes. Master/official student learning outcomes are not approved as part of new course development by a committee of faculty peers; however, the course outcomes that are common are measurable and well-considered. Course outcomes are found on all syllabi. Courses within programs are sequenced in an informal way using advisement and some prerequisites, and a more explicit sequencing project is in the works.

iii. 1.C.3 Meets NWCCU standard

Program outcomes are available in the catalog and a syllabus archive exists, although master/official student learning outcomes for courses are not published in a central location that is widely available to students or faculty. Students demonstrate familiarity with learning outcomes found on syllabi.

iv. 1.C.4 Meets NWCCU standard

Information regarding admission and graduation requirements were clearly defined on the college's website. The information was easily accessible by searching off the college's home website. Great Basin College also has staff to assist students both as they enter and finish their education. Students seemed to understand their graduation requirements either from meeting with an advisor or from the college website.

v. 1.C.5

The College engages in routine learning outcomes assessment at the course level along with annual and cyclic assessment of learning outcomes at the program level, but the evaluation team did not find evidence of ongoing, historical program improvement or effective mapping or tracking of course-level outcomes to program level outcomes in a systematic way. Outcomes at the course and program level are not systematically used to identify gaps in learning that lead to curricular or programmatic changes.

Compliment #4: Some promising assessment practices are underway in English and math, particularly the use of portfolios for capstone assessment in English and the more systemic assessment of outcomes in math.

vi. 1.C.6

Although the institution has recently restructured their general education outcomes to be robust and comprehensive, the assessment effort for general education is still in development. The evaluation team found no evidence of

institutional learning outcomes that overlay or unite program level outcomes in the academic and professional-technical programs.

vii. 1.C.7

Although the College engages in routine learning outcomes assessment at the course and program level, the committee did not find evidence of formal or systemic integration of the results of these assessments into institutional planning. Further, learning support areas also did not demonstrate a continuous and systematic effort in assessing programs.

viii. 1.C.8 Meets NWCCU standard

Transfer credit and credit for prior learning is accepted based on NSHE policies. Transfer courses not previously articulated are referred to the appropriate academic department for consultation. GBC has an articulation agreement with all of the four-year institutions in Nevada to facilitate smooth transitions.

ix. 1.C.9 Not Applicable

d. Standard 1.D: Student Achievement

i. 1.D.1 Meets NWCCU standard

Great Basin College works to provide a positive educational experience to all students. Staff encourage students to reach their full potential and not limit students in their educational goals. The orientation process for students is being redesigned and while currently may not be meeting the standard, should do so moving forward.

ii. 1.D.2

The NSHE system has a set of indicators supporting five strategic goals for the entire system. The indicators are at an institutional level and some are disaggregated. Some of the indicators also included data from comparison colleges. However, the data is not consistently disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, and first-generation college student. While some college staff made a limited reference to the disaggregated indicators, the indicators are not incorporated into a systematic institutional evaluation process. Nor had the college used them to identify equity gaps it intended to address.

The college has not adopted a specific set of student achievement indicators for institutional evaluation and improvement. It was unclear if the institution intends to use some or all of the NSHE indicators or identify additional ones. The indicators that are being used are not broadly understood by staff and faculty. College leadership expressed the intent to identify detailed student achievement indicators, possibly at a program level, and disaggregate the data as a part of an upcoming strategic plan development process.

iii. 1.D.3

The NSHE system has a set of indicators supporting five strategic goals for the entire system. The indicators are at an institutional level and some are disaggregated. Some of the indicators also included data from comparison colleges. All the data is available on the NSHE Institutional Research website (https://ir.nevada.edu/strategic_plan.php).

The college publishes data dashboards on its website. The data is not currently incorporated explicitly into a planning or budgeting process because the college does not have a continuous improvement process developed that could be informed with the disaggregated student achievement data. College leaders stated the intent to develop an ongoing continuous improvement process with disaggregated student achievement indicators as part of the effort to develop and implement a new strategic plan.

iv. 1.D.4

The process and methodology for collecting data are transparent. However, these are not yet used systematically to inform and implement strategies or allocate resources. The college does not have a continuous improvement process developed that could be informed with the disaggregated student achievement data. College leaders stated the intent to develop an ongoing continuous improvement process with disaggregated student achievement indicators as part of the effort to develop and implement a new strategic plan.

VI. Standard 2: Governance, Resources, and Capacity

a. Standard 2.A: Governance

i. 2.A.1 Meets NWCCU standard

The college has an effective governance structure with a statewide governing body comprising 13 Board of Regents and a Chancellor of the NSHE system. NSHE policies define the scope of authority for the Board of Regents, Chancellor, and institution.

ii. 2.A.2 Meets NWCCU standard

The college has an effective leadership structure with appropriately qualified administrators who have appropriate levels of authority for fulfilling their responsibilities.

iii. 2.A.3 Meets NWCCU standard

The college has an appropriately qualified chief executive officer with full-time responsibility to the college and prior experience as a college president.

iv. 2.A.4 Meets NWCCU standard

Documented decision-making structures and procedures exist at the NSHE and institutional levels to ensure the views of faculty, staff, students, and administrators are considered on matters where each has a direct interest. Examples include the faculty voice in curricular issues, staff voice in employee scholarships, and student voice in fee increases, starting academic programs, starting an athletic team, and student activities related items.

b. Standard 2.B: Academic Freedom

i. 2.B.1 Meets NWCCU standard

Institutional norms demonstrate strong adherence to the principles of academic freedom and independence.

ii. 2.B.2 Meets NWCCU standard

The institution has strong cultural norms to ensure compliance with the standards of academic freedom as described in the NSHE Code and the American Association of University Professors "Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure."

Concern #1: The college does not have a locally developed policy or statement that articulates these standards specifically for the GCB context.

c. Standard 2.C: Policies and Procedures

i. 2.C.1 Meets NWCCU standard

Great Basin College's transfer credit policy was readily available on the institution website. Credits transferred from another accredited institution are evaluated individually. Great Basin College recently hired a full-time transfer coordinator to work with in-bound and out-bound students.

ii. 2.C.2 Meets NWCCU standard

Information regarding student rights and responsibilities was available in the college catalog and on the college website. Academic dishonesty and conduct

appeals were outlined within the student rights and responsibilities. Student grievances were outlined in the on-line catalogue, but was not easily searchable on the college website. The policies and procedures regarding accommodations for persons with disabilities were outlined on the Accessibility Services for Students website.

iii. 2.C.3 Meets NWCCU standard

The institution has a comprehensive admissions policy which includes a policy outlining placement standards into some entry courses to help ensure a students' academic success. The College website also outlines what standards a student needs to maintain in order to be in good academic standing with the college. The college's policy on termination of an educational program is available on the website and is integrated into the policy of the Nevada System on Higher Education.

iv. 2.C.4 Meets NWCCU standard

The institution's policies and procedures related to confidentiality and release of student records was available in the catalog and on the institution website. Students must complete a form in order for institutional records to be released. Most student records are retained in a password protected document imaging system. Other forms such as admission applications are stored on a central server as part of the NSHE system located in Reno and Las Vegas. All staff and students working with student records are required to complete FERPA training prior to accessing these records.

d. Standard 2.D: Institutional Integrity

i. 2.D.1 Meets NWCCU standard

The college represents its mission and institutional offerings in a thorough and comprehensive manner through its annual catalog and website. The information provided by GBC publications clearly articulate the institution's mission of providing post-secondary education to rural Nevada through equitable distribution of its services throughout sparsely populated areas of the State. Representations by GBC demonstrate a strong commitment to its academic intentions, and that its programs can be completed in a timely fashion.

Compliment #5: GBC publishes a concise and clearly written Communications Plan and Procedures Guide, which provides college personnel with clear direction for how GBC communicates about itself externally. Through its annual Catalog Planning Timeline, and quarterly monitoring of the GBC website, the institution ensures that its representations about mission, programs, and services are

accurate, current, and are being offered at the highest levels of institutional integrity.

ii. 2.D.2 Meets NWCCU standard

GBC subscribes to Federal and State laws regarding the equitable treatment of students, faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as other stakeholders and constituents of the institution. GBC policies outline reporting procedures, processes and timelines utilized by the institution for adjudicating complaints and grievances, as well as provisions for disciplinary actions and sanctions. GBC demonstrates through its management and operations, that its dealings with the public, NWCCU, and other external organizations embody the principals of a high ethical standard.

iii. 2.D.3 Meets NWCCU standard

GBC adheres to Nevada State statutes and the NSHE codes governing the actions and conduct of the appointed board members, administrators, faculty and classified staff. The Code of Ethical Standards delineate expected codes of conduct for which all GBC employees are subject, and that include standards governing gift restrictions, use of information, and conflicts of interest.

GBC reports that new employees are required to complete a nepotism disclosure, and that academic and administrative faculty are required annually to report on external compensated professional services and other issues which might constitute conflicts of interest. After reviewing collected data, a summary report is submitted to NSHE. GBC refers any allegations of conflicts of interest to the office of the Vice President for Business Affairs for an in-depth review that would be conducted in concert with the institution's legal counsel.

e. Standard 2.E: Financial Resources

i. 2.E.1 Meets NWCCU standard

Institutional finances for GBC are aggregated by NSHE and for all State universities, colleges, and post-secondary educational institutions in the State of Nevada. NSHE regularly solicits external financial audits for its system of higher education. Likewise, the GBC Foundation submits to annual external financial audits under the oversight of NSHE.

GBC is acutely aware of State appropriations and local revenue generation as well as cash flow and reserve management that is required to fulfill its mission. GBC utilized its reserves to accommodate shortfalls during the 2020 pandemic. While reserves are now below GBC target levels, its available reserves during the pandemic proved to be a good litmus test during trying economic times.

ii. 2.E.2 Meets NWCCU standard

In 2015, Nevada implemented a new performance-based budget model which resulted in a 30% decrease in the State appropriations to GBC. However, GBC reports that it has successfully earned back all of the performance-based budget “carve-outs” in each of the years the new model has been in effect. GBC also reports that it has recovered approximately 50% of the overall budget reduction from State appropriations through student fee increases. GBC does have the opportunity to participate in meetings with NSHE where individual institutional performance metrics are established for the purpose of earning back the budget carve outs.

GBC has utilized a Budget Taskforce to evaluate and recommend efficiency measures and reallocations among institutional budget line items. GBC also utilizes student representatives to provide input and recommendations on proposed fee increases at the institution. GBC demonstrates the ability to absorb extraordinary costs through accumulated reserves and other risk management methods.

Concern #2: With the ongoing pandemic, and with GBC still making adjusting to the performance-based budget model, there appears to have been a lull in soliciting full participation by stakeholders in GBC budget development.

iii. 2.E.3 Meets NWCCU standard

In concert with NSHE, GBC transparently manages financial resources in accordance with institutional objectives, as well as State and Federal Laws.

Compliment #6: The GBC Foundation is complimented for its commitment to the educational mission of GBC. When a performance-based funding model was implemented in Nevada it created much financial uncertainty for GBC. The GBC Foundation pledged up to \$900,000 in backup funding to the institution to mitigate budget shortfalls created by the new budget model. The Foundation has also been instrumental in facilitating dual credit programs at GBC, which has largely been responsible for growth in student enrollment during the 2020 pandemic. The unique makeup of the thirteen Foundation Board members from the many diverse areas of the State that GBC serves, ensures that its regional representation aligns the Foundation with the rural and frontier mission of GBC.

f. Standard 2.F: Human Resources

i. 2.F.1 Meets NWCCU standard

Nevada Administrative Code, NSHE Board of Regents policy statements, and GBC policies collectively support that the institution apprises its personnel of conditions of employment, work assignments, rights and responsibilities, and performance evaluation criteria, as well as methods of retention, promotion, and termination for the multiple personnel classifications employed by GBC.

ii. 2.F.2 Meets NWCCU standard

GBC demonstrates through its “grant-in-aid” program, which is available to all GBC personnel classifications, that the institution is providing support and encouragement for employee professional growth and development.

iii. 2.F.3 Meets NWCCU standard

In spite of losing significant numbers of FTE due to State budget cuts, GBC has been able to retain and replace critical personnel across all of its personnel classifications. Likewise, through the budgeting process with NSHE, GBC has been able to add new FTE in critical growth areas of the institution. GBC presently demonstrates that it is capable of employing adequate numbers of qualified personnel to achieve its educational objectives, create and oversee institutional policies, and to ensure continuity and integrity of its academic programs.

Concern #3: The evaluation committee is unable to project how the long-term effects of State budget reductions and loss of approximately 80 FTE will ultimately impact GBC staffing efficacy.

iv. 2.F.4 Meets NWCCU standard

GBC maintains discrete evaluation procedures administered annually by trained supervisors for tenured and tenure-track faculty, part time instructors, adjunct faculty, administrative exempt personnel, and classified non-exempt personnel. GBC provides evidence that performance criteria are clearly articulated to its personnel, and that the process is characterized by sufficient opportunities for interaction with supervisors, is equitably administered and monitored, and with substantive appeal procedures available to GBC personnel.

g. Standard 2.G: Student Support Resources

i. 2.G.1 Meets NWCCU standard

Great Basin College has several education programs and services which support student learning and success. The College has *Starfish* which tracks a student’s

advising and academic process. The Academic Success Center offerings tutoring and placement services. Students with documented disabilities can receive services through the Accessibility Support Services office. The College also offers a Veterans Resource Center. There are also numerous clubs and organizations in which students can participate.

ii. 2.G.2 Meets NWCCU standard

The college catalog is available on the website. The catalog contains all the necessary items as outlined in this standard including current and accurate information regarding institutional mission, degree and program completion, learning outcomes, and required courses. The cost of tuition, fees, additional program costs, as well as the refund policy and procedures are listed in the catalog. Information regarding financial aid and various types of aid can be found in the catalog. The names, titles and degrees held of administrators and full-time faculty are also listed in the college catalog.

iii. 2.G.3 Meets NWCCU standard

The College catalog lists the requirements of specific programs. Many programs do not have eligibility or employment requirements.

iv. 2.G.4 Meets NWCCU standard

v. 2.G.5 Meets NWCCU standard

Financial aid is awarded consistent with the institution's mission and based on student needs and institutional resources. Students have access to federal, state and institutional aid which is detailed and easily accessible on the website. Student loans are not initially awarded to students and must be requested in order that students don't borrow unnecessary funds. Students receive loan counseling annually when they apply for loans. Students also receive loan repayment information as they leave the institution. The last published rate of 11.0% in 2016, is above the national average of 10.1%. While higher than the national average, GBC's default rate has decreased over the last two reporting years.

Concern #4: The college's loan default rate could not be found on the website.

vi. 2.G.6 Meets NWCCU standard

Academic advising is mostly a centralized function on campus. New students are required to meet with their academic advisor prior to registering for classes. The NSHE recently purchased Starfish for all of the campuses to utilize and implementation has been very successful. Staff in academic advising are knowledgeable of the various academic programs and graduation requirements.

The college has a new director of academic advising as well as an additional advisor.

vii. 2.G.7 Meets NWCCU standard

Students taking on-line courses utilize the learning management system, Canvas, for all course information, work and examinations. Canvas requires a unique log-in and password for each student. In addition, most courses utilize Respondus Lockdown Browser or Zoom on-line testing utilizing staff as proctors to ensure identity verification.

h. Standard 2.H: Library and Information Resources

i. 2.H.1 Meets NWCCU standard

The institution provides on-ground and remote access to sufficient resources to support the learning objectives of the instructional programs. Library services receive both support and advocacy from faculty to ensure alignment.

i. Standard 2.I: Physical and Technology Infrastructure

i. 2.I.1 Meets meet NWCCU standard

The institution provides physical space and infrastructure that promotes healthful teaching, learning, and working environments that are consistent with GBC's academic and services mission for rural and frontier Nevada constituencies. The institution is especially proud of its technological achievements that promote extremely effective distance learning programs. GBC feels that its unique style of interactive video instruction provides the institution with a competitive advantage in recruiting its target students. During the 2020 pandemic, GBC exercised entrepreneurial strategies for increasing dual-enrollment students during the summer by nearly 18%, while also seeing a 6% increase in fall FTE enrollment.

VII. Summary

Great Basin College has undergone significant changes over the past few years resulting from policy shifts at the state level, budget cuts, executive leadership turnover, enrollment fluctuations, and a pandemic. Despite, and in some cases, because of these changes, the college has stayed true to its mission to provide higher education services to the people of rural and frontier Nevada. The devotion by college employees to the college mission was palpable, even via a virtual visit. The institution is engaged in efforts that will help ensure its success in the upcoming accreditation cycle. As the college builds on its strengths noted as commendations in this report, and addresses the recommendations also listed in this report, it will improve its ability to meet its mission in a sustainable fashion.

VIII. Commendations and Recommendations

a. Commendations

Commendation 1:

The evaluation team commends the institution for its atmosphere of caring and collegiality. It is evident that interactions between the students and both faculty and staff are very positive. Students cite time and again all the assistance they receive from both faculty and staff when issues or questions arise. Administrators, faculty, staff and students alike exhibit a deep sense of pride for this institution, its people, and its mission.

Commendation 2:

The evaluation team commends the institution for its robust information technology systems that facilitate realistic distance learning applications, that are universally praised by users, and that served as a resource that promoted rapid adaptation for students needing to continue their coursework during the 2020 pandemic. In alignment with information technology, the small distance learning team manages to provide thorough and comprehensive support for high-quality remote instruction in both synchronous and asynchronous modalities.

b. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

The evaluation team recommends that the institution develop a regular, coherent, and comprehensive program of assessment of learning outcomes that standardizes and memorializes course-level outcomes, that explicitly maps course-level outcomes to program-level, institutional and/or general education outcomes, and that is used deliberately and intentionally for institutional planning and resource allocation. 1.C.2, 1.C.5, 1.C.6, 1.C.7

Recommendation 2:

The evaluation team recommends that the institution establish clear goals, objectives, and indicators, including widely available disaggregated data, to define mission fulfillment and develop an ongoing and systematic institutional evaluation and planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement. 1.B.1, 1.B.2, 1.B.3, 1.B.4, 1.C.7, 1.D.2, 1.D.3, 1.D.4