Year Seven Evaluation Report

North Idaho College
Coeur d’Alene, Idaho
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A confidential report of findings prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
Reviewers

Dr. Tana L. Hasart
President Emeritus
Pierce College
6106 96th Street E.
Puyallup, WA  98371

Dr. Warren Brown
Executive Vice President for Instruction and
Student Services
Seattle Central Community College
1701 Broadway, BE 4180
Seattle, WA  98122

Ms. Laurie K. Clary
Vice President for Instruction
Grays Harbor College
1620 Edward P. Smith Drive
Aberdeen, WA  98520

Dr. Lisa Matye Edwards
Vice President of Student Services
Lower Columbia College
1600 Maple Street
P.O. Box 3010
Longview, WA  98632

Ms. Deborah Frazier
Vice President for Administrative Services
Peninsula College
1502 East Lauridsen Blvd.
Port Angeles, WA  98362

Mr. Jack Horton
Reference Librarian
Highline Community College
2400 South 240th Street
P.O. Box 98000
Des Moines, WA  98198-9800

Dr. Alison Stevens
Dean, Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
North Seattle Community College
9600 College Way North
Seattle, WA  98103-3599
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Introduction

North Idaho College (NIC) is a comprehensive community college located in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, founded in 1913. The college offers certificates and associated degrees in more than 80 academic and professional program areas. The institution operates on a semester system, with courses offered during fall and spring terms as well as during the summer. NIC operates several outreach centers as well as a Workforce Training Center in nearby Post Falls.

Since the last accreditation visit the institution has undergone significant change in both leadership and size. With one exception, all senior administrators are new to the college within the last two years. Enrollment now reflects service to approximately 7,000 students throughout a five county region. The campus is responding to these challenging factors with skill, hope, and optimism.

Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

Based on careful study, on-site interviews, and an evaluation of exhibits, the self-evaluation report was found to be comprehensive and helpful. Supporting documentation and exhibits were readily accessible to the team and other needed information available upon request. While somewhat balanced with respect to description and evidence, the inclusion of specific best-practice or compliance examples within the report would also have been helpful to the team.

Eligibility Requirements

The institution meets the eligibility requirements identified by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. Of special note is the following information about specific Eligibility Requirements:

- **Mission and Core Themes:** The institution’s mission, vision, and values underwent a thorough review and change during the past year. As the institution moves into Year One an additional opportunity exists for minor adjustments as highlighted during the Year Seven evaluation. Based on interviews and documentation related to the previous review process, careful attention should be paid to actively including a balance of community and campus representatives in future such efforts.

- **Non-Discrimination:** Through written goals and documentation, it is evident that the institution places a high emphasis on diversity and non-discrimination, acting as a model for the Northern Idaho region.

- **Governing Board:** Two of five governing board members are new to their roles. The board has in place clear methods for board orientation, mentorship, and evaluation.
• **Administration:** The NIC administration has undergone significant changes during the past two years, with almost every member new to their role. Despite this phenomenon, college employees and members of the community laud the efforts of this new administrative team and list several accomplishments resulting from their hard work.

• **Library and Information Resources:** For several years the Library Director position has remained unfilled. While employees maintain the library collection and participate in the development of information literacy measures, the lack of designated leadership for this major contributor to core theme success is of concern to the accreditation team.

• **Physical and Technological Infrastructure:** NIC reflects well-maintained facilities and grounds. Efforts also include a strong emphasis on sustainable practices.

• **Institutional Effectiveness:** The institution does not employ an integrated planning process that sets the direction and goals for the institution. The current strategic plan includes elements that are both long-range and operational; reviewers found little evidence of planning, forecasting, and prioritization in the areas of budget, capital projects, and academic and support services, especially those associated with site and distance education.

  Assessment poses a second area of concern. It was unclear to the team how the institution identified several of its assessment measures. In some instances benchmarks for success did not clearly tie to core theme progress/improvement and reviewers were unable to determine how some thresholds for success were developed.

• **Scale and Sustainability:** While there was evidence that the institution has increased operations in order to meet regional needs, the lack of integrated planning, especially in the area of budget/financial forecasting and facilities master planning, fail to guide decisions related to campus and regional expansion. The achievement of core themes and mission fulfillment cannot be adequately documented and analyzed without clear, specific, data-informed assessment mechanisms.
Section One - Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

Mission

In spring 2011 the Board of Trustees commissioned a Long Range Visioning and Planning Committee whose charge was to review and update the mission, vision, and values statements of NIC. The updated mission statement (adopted in March 2012) defines the focus and direction of college activities and endeavors. Evidence gathered from constituent group representatives (administrators, faculty, staff, and students) attests to a well-documented and widely understood mission for North Idaho College, but some dissatisfaction with campus involvement in recent planning efforts, especially the lack of balance between community and campus representation involved in the process.

Evidence demonstrates that careful attention is made to ensure the institution is guided by its mission. Lack of a fully-integrated planning structure and clear, sharp indicators for success, however, results in an uneven evaluation of mission fulfillment.

Core Themes and Expectations

Core themes identified by NIC align with and support mission fulfillment at the institution. These core themes are developed in a manner so as to guide planning, resource allocation, and assessment of progress. In some instances, core themes lack well-defined measureable criteria that can be used to set goals, evaluate institutional performance, and inform improvement efforts. Students, faculty, and staff were all able to give specific examples of how they contribute to accomplishments related to each core theme. A comprehensive review of progress against each core theme is included in a later section of this report.
Section Two - Resources and Capacity

Governance

The governance structure of NIC is, for the most part, clearly-defined and understood by all constituent groups. Many individuals and groups attest to their ability to provide input to institutional decisions in areas such as curriculum, planning, budgeting, and policy. Due to recent growth in both size and complexity, the college is undergoing a review process to ensure clear and specific roles, responsibilities, and alignment of governance structures and decision-making processes.

There is clear definition of authority for both the Board of Trustees and the college administration. At a recent retreat the board and new president explored their respective roles as pertains to the adopted Policy Governance Model of leadership. Institutional policies, regulations, and appropriate procedures are drafted at the organizational level, and then reviewed by the College Senate and Board of Trustees prior to adoption. There is ample evidence that most institutional policies are well-documented, and with a comprehensive policy review underway the team is confident that this important infrastructure will be aligned to serve an expanded and changing institution. Evidence affirms that the college operates in accordance with Idaho state higher education statutes and applicable federal guidelines.

The institution takes care to ensure compliance with the Commission’s Standards for Accreditation. Interviews and documentation attest to the seriousness with which the college is undertaking methods to ensure mission fulfillment and performance improvement. With little exception, members of the college community can clearly link their contributions to the adopted core themes and discuss how they are engaged in assessment activities. In addition, the institution regularly monitors external mandates such as financial aid and accreditation standards to ensure compliance.

NIC has an appropriate system of governance and well-established decision-making structures that will be strengthened as a result of study and adjustment. The Board of Trustees engages in policy governance work to include planning, resource allocation, and policy development and approval. The president operates the college under the direction and guidance of the Board. The College Senate and other institutional governance entities provide operational direction and oversight.

Governing Board

The governing board for NIC is comprised of five elected members. Roles and responsibilities of board members are clearly defined and well-documented, with evidence attesting to delegated leadership with respect to specific board duties. The board uses their expertise and shares board responsibilities in a manner that appears seamless and collaborative. Members of the board work to be independent from business operations of the college through their adoption and understanding of policy governance and have in place an adopted conflict of interest policy. Two members of the board are new to their roles; more senior members assume orientation,
mentorship, and evaluation duties as pertains to the inclusion and integration of these new members.

The board acts as a committee of the whole and assumes broad oversight for budget, planning, policies, and institutional performance. The college president is hired by the board, and then answers to them for evaluation and monitoring purposes. Evidence demonstrates that both the board and the president of the college are evaluated systematically and periodically using well-developed tools and methods. Work continues to ensure the board focuses on strategic and policy elements while the president is empowered to manage the operational aspects of NIC.

When asked about their role in succession planning, board members indicate they have not explored that topic. Leadership changes at the institution are significant – even with new administrators in place the board should discuss appropriate succession planning in order to assure institutional sustainability.

**Leadership and Management**

The institution reflects an effective leadership structure that engages in planning and oversees and supervises institutional functions in a manner that supports continuous improvement. Of note is the long-standing absence of Library Services leadership, a circumstance that limits assessment efforts and reduces potential for core theme accomplishments.

While most members of the leadership team are new to their roles, it is evident to the reviewers that they are committed to the institution and its work. Individuals have strong backgrounds and experiences, demonstrating their qualification for performing in their respective roles.

**Policies and Procedures**

**Academic**

Evidence that academic policies are fully developed and made available to employees and students was apparent. Library and information resource policies are appropriately developed and employed.

**Students**

Student policies as identified in Standard 2.A.15 are in place and examples of fair application and administration evident. While procedures are in place, the college does not have a transfer-of-credit policy (Standard 2.A.16) to guide admission and placement and fully inform students about how earned and transferred credits are recognized. Co-curricular policies are in place and well-administered.

**Human Resources**

Faculty, staff, and administrators meet stated qualifications with many employees exceeding the minimum criteria for positions. In the past 12 months NIC has filled a significant number of upper-level administrative positions, including the president, three vice-presidents, and the
director and assistant director of human resources. Searches resulted in candidate pools from a broad geographic region with large numbers of applicants. Through interview and an examination of applicable policies, hiring procedures were appropriate for the positions.

The institution employs 506 support and operational staff (not including student employees), 141 of which are full-time administrative or professional, 212 full-time classified, and the remaining 153 part-time. While full-time jobs follow a prescribed hiring process including appropriate advertising, clearly-defined criteria, and well-developed job descriptions, it is suggested that part-time hires be posted and performance expectations be made transparent in order to ensure contributions to core themes are accomplished by all employees.

Institutional Integrity

Representation of the college, its programs, and its services is accurate and clear. Work to ensure communication, both internally and externally, is effective and efficient was attested to by employees and community members alike. Key publications such as the college catalog and schedule are up-to-date and contain policy references and links.

A review of documents and interviews with college personnel make it evident that the institution and its employees exhibit high ethical standards. There are clear channels for voicing complaints and grievances, and responses are managed in a professional and timely manner. Board members have in place a conflict of interest policy and provide examples of how they adhere to this guideline. Policies are also in place to inform tenants of intellectual property practices. Accreditation status for NIC is documented and accurately represented.

Academic Freedom

The college has in place a clear board-adopted policy regarding academic freedom. Faculty report the latitude to design course content and present information to their students without either internal or external pressure. Students express confidence in their ability to offer a wide range of perspectives in a safe and supportive learning environment. Appropriate citations and acknowledgement of information sources (professional and personal) are evident in written records of the college.

Finance

It was found that budget oversight and contractual procedures are maintained according to clearly-defined policies. One area of concern involves the capital projects area – care should be taken to insure accurate and comprehensive cost projections are established and reflected in construction contracts. The development of a facilities master plan is essential to aiding in the accomplishment of this work.

Financial resource policies and procedures are in place and evidence attests to the regular monitoring of these practices. The institution immediately responds to any deviation from policy through both appropriate personnel action and the adjustment of policies where warranted.
Work is underway to develop a system for accurate budget forecasting. In addition, the college is to be complimented for clarifying budget elements, increasing the transparency of budget processes, and initiating program- and department-level budget monitoring tools.

**Human Resources**

Faculty qualifications are consistent with the requirements for specific instructional assignments and courses taught; however, requirements may not be readily apparent to those outside of NIC as faculty degrees and credentials are not consistently included in the online directory. NIC has 148 full-time tenure or tenure-track faculty and 258 adjunct instructors. With the exception of an irregularity noted in 2008, faculty hiring is a transparent and reliable process that follows established human resource procedures.

Several efficiencies in the Human Resources Department have been realized through the use of software solutions, including online applicant tracking. This progress requires ongoing training for hiring managers and has aided efficient review of applicant pools. The performance management system, consisting of annual evaluations developed by human resources which include upward (or career progression) evaluations, will be transitioned to the same online. At this time upward evaluation processes are used by the academic administration, with plans in place to expand the process to other units of the college. Staff report that the Human Resources Department supports their growth and are readily accessible to hear issues and concerns.

The college has multiple sources for funding a wide range of staff and faculty professional development. Funds are available college-wide and also within specific departments for targeted training. Sabbaticals are now available to both staff and faculty. The institution hosts an annual Employee Day planned by a college-wide committee. Time, fiscal resources, and access to professional development are a challenge for staff and faculty located at outreach sites. This barrier is noted by the institution as an area of concern. A human resources advisory committee is exploring possible solutions.

Faculty responsibilities and workloads are defined through college policies and procedures. Policies addressing faculty expectations were revised during fall 2010 and include procedures that address teaching, course development, college services (including advising), governance and committee responsibilities, and learning-support activities.

NIC’s faculty evaluation process was found to be transparent, well-documented, and supportive of the high level of instructional quality noted by students, staff, and faculty. Students share their perception of the value of higher education and their ability to provide input regarding the quality of their academic experiences.

NIC is to be complimented on their innovative development of employee benefits programs, including a Wellness Program, Child Care Center, and multiple professional development opportunities. These employee support elements transcend traditional models reflected by most other colleges and are noted as exceptional practices by the campus community.
Consistent with its mission, North Idaho College offers academic transfer and professional technical programs that result in Associate of Science, Associate of Arts, and Associate in Applied Science degrees as well as Advanced Technical and Technical Certificates. Degrees and certificates contain appropriate content and rigor, and are designated following generally accepted titles in accordance with Idaho State Board of Education policies.

Course syllabi include expected student learning outcomes and are provided to students in written and electronic formats. While clearly documented internally, there is no evidence that the institution identifies and publishes program and degree learning outcomes.

NIC documents the achievement of learning outcomes by the award of degrees and certificates, in addition to the inclusion of general education learning outcomes (nine “abilities”) and professional-technical outcomes specific to each credit course taught. The Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee (SLOA) has put a three-year cycle of outcomes assessment into place. There are a number of well-considered, thoroughly researched projects in place, such as a carefully crafted flowchart which reconfigures the nine general education abilities as the driver of course offerings and course design. However, during a review of written material and in meetings with faculty and administration, the team noted gaps with regard to student outcomes. First, while credit courses do contain learning outcomes within the general education abilities that are published on the course syllabi, there is insufficient evidence that a student receiving a degree from the college has met all of the outcomes. Second, certain courses offered by the college – non-credit in particular – do not include documented learning outcomes, norms, or equivalencies.

Credit degrees reflect accepted learning outcomes for higher education. Course content is consistent with the requirements for similar degrees and certificates at peer institutions and is clearly defined in the self-evaluation report, on the NIC web page and in the catalog.

Sequencing appears appropriate, with graduation requirements clearly defined. Each of the transfer degrees includes a core of general education recognized by four-year colleges and universities, providing NIC students with junior standing upon transfer. Associate in Applied Science and Technical Certificates meet industry standards and include required related general education components as defined by the State of Idaho Division of Professional-Technical Education.

NIC admission requirements are clearly published on the NIC website and in the catalog. The reviewers compliment the college on successfully guiding students through the admissions process. Degree programs at NIC are appropriate in breadth and depth as described on the NIC web page and catalog; degree designators are consistent with program content.

Faculty involvement in curriculum revision, design and implementation is clearly defined. Ownership for the design and approval of curriculum resides with faculty, who initiate all proposals for change or deletions. The process begins at the division level and moves to the Curriculum Council, with final approval by the Vice President for Instruction. In addition to
faculty, the Curriculum Council includes ex-officio members from college administration and student support services, along with a student representative.

**Undergraduate Programs**

North Idaho College does not award credit for prior experiential learning, as confirmed by their self-evaluation report. The NIC catalog is clear about how NIC credits transfer to other institutions. While referenced in the self-evaluation report, the Evaluation Team found that guidelines for how NIC accepts transfer credit are not published and therefore cannot be assured that these processes are clearly communicated to students.

NIC is to be recognized in providing a breath of transfer degree options for their students. The college catalog clearly displays the general education core for both the AA-Transfer and the AS-Transfer degrees. The integration of humanities/fine arts, mathematical/natural sciences, and social sciences form a recognizable core of general education courses. NIC should be congratulated for the discipline-specific AA and AS options that are available to students.

NIC Applied degrees (AAS) have clearly stated general education core requirements: communication, computation, and human relations. NIC offers several certificate programs. Although it is difficult to find the list of the certificate programs online, it is clear that integrated and stand-alone courses meet the general education abilities.

The college is using ongoing assessments through entry and exit essays, as well as rubrics in English Composition and a variety of courses. However, NIC also acknowledged that there are varying levels of assessment of general education taking place. Some programs have been assessing their general education for several years, while other areas are now piloting new assessment instruments. Since NIC has identified “program” (“program” is defined as discipline for NIC), it is unclear how the assessment in these courses articulate up to the “program” and then to the degree. Hence, the term “identifiable and assessable learning outcomes” does not clarify whether graduating NIC students have reached all abilities. At the same time, NIC has established a clear timeline to use the SLOA committee’s three-year assessment plan and the five-year program review cycle to ensure that the nine abilities are reviewed.

Related education requirements for the applied degrees and certificates are clearly indicated and described in each of the program offerings. Course descriptions and expected outcomes of related education courses (English, math, etc.) are clearly indicated and described. NIC has made a deliberate choice to offer the related instruction as blocks of specialized instruction; this is clearly communicated to students as well as clearly identifiable to the accreditation evaluator. NIC is urged to continue implementing assessment of general education outcomes, ensuring that students completing an applied degree and certificate meet the college-wide “abilities.”

As noted in NIC’s self-study and verified through the NWCCU “Basic Institutional Data Form” – NIC does not offer graduate programs.
Continuing and Non-Credit Programs

All of the programs directed from the Workforce Training Center are noted in the self-study to have instructors that are subject matter experts with appropriate expertise in the field. NIC’s Customized Training Service offers classes that “are developed with the assistance of subject matter experts”. Many customized program faculty are full-time faculty on the main campus. Even when Ed2go, dual credit, or customized trainings are offered with faculty who are not currently qualified NIC faculty, the division chairs maintain authority over reviewing and/or training the faculty to meet NIC’s educational standards.

Student classroom evaluations are an integral part of the quality assurance process. The NIC administration and faculty are involved in the assessment, planning, and evaluation of the special programs. There is some degree of internal concern regarding the division chair role in assigning all faculty in specialized program and online course offerings. It is important that the division chairs continue to employ alternative delivery modes that include online and off-site special programs, using data-based decisions to ensure that the needs (e.g., time, place, and manner) of place bound students are identified and supported.

In the self-study and college catalog NIC clearly indicate that CEUs are awarded based on specified standards in certain approved programs. When applicable, granting of credit is based upon course outcomes completion that meets both NIC and state standards for issuing CEU credit.

The NIC self-study noted that in 2011, an impressive number of students (6,298 headcount) enrolled in classes through the Workforce Training Center and/or Community Education. Furthermore, NIC maintains both print and electronic records that describe the number and nature/mode of learning provided through non-credit instruction.

Student Support Resources

North Idaho College includes Student Success as a core theme and it is apparent that student success is a goal embraced by all involved in the college from faculty to staff. As an open-access institution, NIC has many resources and departments to support learning needs. From co-curricular activities that take advantage of the beautiful campus location to cultural and performing arts, there is visible evidence of a vibrant campus life.

The Vice President of Student Services has been with the institution for a relatively short time (six months); staff and administrators indicate student services leadership is well-respected across campus by students, faculty and staff. Student services departments have chosen to implement the nationally-recognized CAS standards and related program outcomes in support of college core themes.

The college website and catalog includes necessary and current information to support student learning, clearly outlining student rights, responsibilities, and academic policies and procedures. This extends to the residence halls that have a well-developed residence student handbook.
Students consistently state that they are supported in their learning; when questions or issues arise, students note that multiple staff or faculty can be called upon to assist with concerns.

In recent years, NIC has taken aggressive steps to address ongoing issues related to financial aid, loan default management, and financial literacy. Policies regarding financial aid disbursement are developed with student success in mind, balancing the need for institutional monitoring of returns to Title IV and other fiscal responsibilities. The ties between financial aid and enrollment management are evident through discussions with students and staff and could be explored as indicators for the core theme of student success.

The physical spaces occupied by services critical to enrollment (Financial Aid, Registration/Registrar, Testing and Admissions) limit the ability to serve students with accessibility challenges, privacy needs, and a demand for access during peak service periods. Through review of documents related to enrollment management and as heard during forums with staff and faculty, a “One Stop Shop” concept is being considered to address the current barriers presented by the physical location.

Academic advising is both a student service function as well as an instructional faculty expectation. Students are introduced to services and advising through OARS (new student orientation). While not mandatory, participation in OARS is integrated for college-level academic degree-seeking students during registration periods. As a part of program evaluation methods for delivering the content of OARS to professional technical, dual enrollment, site-based, and online students are being developed, refined, and implemented.

The college has several communication and online tools to provide faculty and staff who serve as academic advisers with current and accurate advising information. Students are introduced to advising resources when attending OARS (new student orientation). Many student support programs (e.g., TRiO, multicultural/veterans programming, and the Center for Educational Access) support students through both developmental and intervention advising practices. Challenges including the students’ ability to register without seeking advising and how to provide appropriate advising for outreach and online students are noted in NIC’s self-study and activities are in place to begin to address these issues. Enrollment management planning, national and state completion efforts, and program reviews all inform planning and initiatives for advising. Further development of measures and indicators used to assess advising activities could be used in support of the college core themes of student success and institutional excellence.

NIC operates multiple auxiliary services for students, staff and faculty while supporting the college mission. Food services, a 198-person residence hall, and the Mica Peak Bookstore are part of the portfolio of self-supporting auxiliary services that also includes the Edminster Student Union. Each auxiliary service has evidence of effective program reviews including specific ties to learning outcomes that support the college mission and core themes. Advisory committees consisting of students and other campus representatives provide input for planning and programming for the four auxiliary services. Plans are underway to add One Card services, integrating multiple enhanced functions related to the NIC student ID card, and a Conferencing and Events management program to better serve both the campus and surrounding community.
Students at NIC are able to enjoy a large variety of co-curricular activities, including a robust Outdoor Pursuits and Recreation Program. Student leaders expressed appreciation for the opportunities provided through engagement in activities related to student government and activities. Along with recreational sports, intercollegiate athletics are a part of NIC’s student experience. Athletics reports directly to the president and is subject to the same institutional oversight as other college areas. Students participating in both co-curricular activities and intercollegiate athletics are held to institutional standards; program outcomes align with core themes. Due to different reporting structures, expectations for student leaders and student athletes do not mirror each other; this could lead to challenges within the institution.

Eligibility for admission, financial aid, academic standards and degree requirements are consistent for all students. NIC’s identity verification process is not sufficient to allow students to test online without a proctor. While several verification processes are in place, including plagiarism software, NIC requires online students taking tests to utilize in-person proctoring either through the outreach centers or other locations via in-person proctoring.

Compliment: The college is to be complimented for the attention and resources provided for diverse populations of students including support services and space dedicated to the needs of students with children, American Indians, veterans and students with accommodation needs. Physical space provided for services and space for these populations was welcoming, inclusive and well utilized by NIC students.

Concern: NIC needs to ensure that policies related to federal laws, specifically accommodations for students with disabilities, are consistently followed by all faculty, staff and employees of the college. NIC has clearly established policies and procedures related to this process that provide the foundation for compliance.

Concern: The current physical location of the Financial Aid Office, Admissions and Registration is limiting and, in the case of Financial Aid service window, is neither private nor accessible for students with disabilities. This arrangement is inadequate in addressing the needs of the office to provide a secure, confidential atmosphere for discussing financial aid matters. Testing for placement is distanced from other enrollment functions. Plans for a “One Stop Shop” as included in the Student Services Programmatic Priorities in the Educational Master Plan would address these concerns.

**Library and Information Resources**

The Molstead Library is a 27,500 square foot space on the first floor of the Molstead Library building. The building is centrally located on the NIC campus. The library, with a recent “facelift” consisting of a repainted interior, new furniture, a dedicated instruction room, and comfortable seating and student work areas, presents a welcoming environment for its users. Student art is prominently displayed throughout the library and adds to the distinctiveness of the space. The mission of the Library, in part, as stated on its website, reads:

Supports the mission of North Idaho College as articulated in its *Strategic Plan.*
Encourages information literacy, critical thinking, and the acquisition of knowledge by providing access to diverse materials and current information technologies; and by also providing instruction in the use and evaluation of those materials and technologies.

Policies regarding access to and use of library and information resources are clearly documented, published, and enforced.

The library section of the NIC Self-Study report was largely descriptive. Librarians who contributed to writing the self-study stated they were advised to keep it brief, as if they were writing “an executive summary.” Conclusions informing this report came largely from discussions with library staff, college faculty, staff, and administrators.

A recurring theme heard during interviews was the lack of a library director. The Vice-President of Instruction, when asked about her perspective on the library fulfilling its mission to support the mission of the college, stated that during the time in her current position (seven months), she had not received any complaints about library services. She stated that the lack of library leadership is “taking a toll” on the two librarians currently serving in a library management role; it limits time they would otherwise have to be proactive to service needs and engage in more outreach. The library has been without a director since 1999; the most recent 2010 search to fill this position proved unsuccessful. The college Educational Master Plan does include recommendations to hire a full-time director and conduct a library staffing needs assessment.

The lack of a library director was the one factor library staff consistently mentioned as negatively impacting the library’s ability to fully fulfill its mission and meet the accreditation standards. Librarians used such terms as “maintaining,” “treading water,” and “putting out fires” to describe their current situation. A reactive service approach was noted in conversations with non-library college staff. In effect, library staff attribute not having a director and the advocacy this position could bring as being responsible for the library not engaging in long-term planning and strategic decision-making; for losing two positions (one faculty; one paraprofessional); and for limiting their engagement in meaningful and systematic assessment of library services and resources. One librarian noted that no specific library assessment has been conducted since 2005. This statement is supported by information from the NIC Self-Study, which identified one general question in the 2011 Student Opinion Survey related to library satisfaction. The survey did not specifically ask about library resources and services. Library staff state that they do receive feedback from library users in the form of informal comments and conversations.

Librarians made a conscious decision to emphasize electronically accessible information, resulting in reductions in print periodicals and the print reference collection. They reached this decision, which reflects the current trend in academic libraries, using a collaborative internal process, basing the decision on professional judgment, and through an experiential understanding of user information needs. A visual inspection of the print book collection showed it to be quite current. The library also provides access to an impressive array of databases. A basic review based on the accreditor’s professional judgment indicates the collection does meet Standard 2.E.1; however, the library staff has not conducted any assessment that would inform this conclusion. These databases and other library electronic resources are available to all NIC students, faculty, and staff both on- and off-campus; the close working relationship between the
Library Technology Coordinator and the college Information Technology Department is instrumental in maintaining and expanding this access.

Library staff provide instruction when requested by other faculty. They attribute staffing and time issues as contributing to a lack of outreach in support of a growing the instruction program. Librarians are not receiving requests from off-campus sites so information literacy instruction is primarily an on-campus undertaking. Library staff report that while they provide instruction, they are not conducting any assessment of related outcomes.

Standard 2.C.6 calls for the partnering of faculty and library staff to ensure that the effective use of library and information resources is integrated in the learning process. This standard, along with 2.E.3., relates to the NIC general education information literacy requirement. Interviews with librarians and members of the SLOA indicate these standards are being met on a focused basis. English 102, considered the “most captive course” taught by the college in that it is taken by more students than any other course, has information literacy as one of its specific learning outcomes. Librarians and English Department faculty, through the auspices of the SLOA, collaborated over a three year period, developing and implementing a 15-question survey to outcomes related to information literacy. This survey is administered to students in all sections of English 102, including to those students enrolled in on-campus, hybrid, and online classes. The stated intent is to maintain and possibly expand on this model.

English 102 faculty report that they are using the data collected from the surveys to inform their instruction, especially in maintaining a focus on the importance of information literacy. Data also assists library staff in identifying online databases and other resources that support English 102 instruction. A conversation with the college’s academic deans and chairs indicate they are familiar with the work of the English Department faculty and librarians and consider it a model for successfully assessing the college’s general education requirement for information literacy.

Financial Resources and Physical and Technological Infrastructure

The institution did not provide evidence of an overarching multi-year strategic plan to guide resource allocation for the future. Future-oriented planning that supports resource allocation (funding, facilities, and information technology) beyond the operational year must be developed in order to ensure organizational sustainability.

Strategic planning is uneven and lacks comprehensiveness. During initial strategic planning processes a wide range of constituent input was gathered and used. Recent planning shows diminishment of college engagement, while community engagement has increased. A more balanced approach is called for in order to ensure that broad-based input from both groups is obtained. It is not evident that the proposed Educational Master Plan has been fully vetted by college constituencies, or that it has been further delineated to include the impact on resource allocation.

Historical enrollment data and intentions for enrollment growth are included in the draft Educational Master Plan, as is historical information about revenues and a list of owned and leased properties. This data is important to decision-making for resource allocations; it is, however, a limited set of data that could be expanded to include, for instance: projections of
enrollment and revenues; an assessment of each facility’s conduction and need for investment to extend useful life and meet teaching and learning needs; and an assessment of information technology and investment needs.

The Educational Master Plan sets forth priorities for facilities, which implies priorities for resource allocation in the areas of funding and information technology. Long-range plans specific to financing, facilities, and information technology in support of educational master planning must be developed to enhance the institution’s decision-making around resource allocation and sustainability.

NIC is complimented for a collaboratively developed and thoroughly documented emergency preparedness plan to respond to various situations. The institution must, however, develop business and information technology continuity plans to support operations after an emergency situation occurs.

Section Three - Institutional Planning

As previously noted, NIC lacks a systematic, integrated, comprehensive planning process that documents the college’s ability to fulfill its mission. A foundational strategic plan was created in 2009, and a review of this plan conducted in preparation for the Year Seven visit. Reviewers found that several assessment indicators tied to the strategic plan were unclear or unconnected. Many of the thresholds for success were not informed by institutional trend data. Leadership recently completed an Educational Master Plan; the results of this effort are still under review. Reviewers could find no evidence of financial forecasting or capital master planning. Each of these elements – strategic, academic, financial, and capital planning – must be present in order to guide resource allocation decisions and institutional capacity.

Section Four – Core Theme Evaluation

Core Theme 1 – Student Success

Planning: The Student Success core theme ties directly to NIC’s mission (“commitment to student success”) and values. Faculty, staff, and students speak highly about the positive and supportive teaching/learning environment at NIC. The Student Success Core Theme also ties directly to objectives 1 and 2 of NICs 2012-2016 Strategic Plan Framework. The self-evaluation report and interviews with faculty and staff show that student outreach occurs, that students have a positive admission experience, and that they are supported in reaching their educational goal. However, there is not enough evidence to show that the “Student Success” theme guides the selection of programs and services to show an alignment with the accomplishment of the objectives. It appears that meaningful planning has not yet occurred. Interviews with campus representatives indicate the “feedback loop” is neither fully aligned nor regularly results in the improvement of programs or services.
Since attending NWCCU training in 2009, NIC has moved quickly to develop and implement its core themes. During this short period of time, NIC formed an Accreditation Executive Committee, established a Core Theme Committee (“theme teams”) to review and revise the core themes, created a Long Range Vision and Planning Committee, engaged a Strategic Planning Committee, and conducted a board review to obtain feedback from several constituencies. The absence of a comprehensive, multi-year strategic plan precludes the ability of NIC to demonstrate that Student Success core theme planning with regard to strategic direction, educational programs, and resources is consistent, aligned, and contributing to the accomplishment of core theme objectives and program and services goals and outcomes. Long-range planning documents must be created and aligned in order to provide direction for future teaching and learning efforts.

**Assessment and Improvement:** Other than having measures that show benchmarking with other institutions, reviewers found that selected norms, institutional data use, and mechanism for meaningful planning are unclear. NIC trend data demonstrates that some objectives do not have national comparative data.

Evidence presented from data collection and use regarding resources forms a very limited data set for decision-making to evaluate accomplishment of core theme objectives and/or program services. In the opinion of the reviewers, the analysis of sometimes limited or uninformed data is too premature to ensure changes are systematically implemented and tested. The institution does demonstrate that the system for Student Success core theme evaluation incorporates assessment of facility and information technology resources. Evidence is not provided to support the holistic evaluation of alignment, correlation, and integration of resources to measure the achievement of core theme objectives or program outcomes. Evidence is provided to support the adequacy or need for improvement of resources in specific areas, but a comprehensive means for the projection and identification of resource needs is not in place.

Objective 2 in Core Theme 1 uses national data nearly exclusively (10 of 12 measures). Local trend data is lacking in the assessment process, and during interviews members of the college community question the relevance and reliability of national comparisons absent a foundation of institutional data. It is difficult to note if the following improvements and/or data are linked to Core Theme fulfillment:

- Page 89 of the self-study notes that “registration services has plans to develop training to further educate the campus on the use of degree audit in an effort to expand its use and make it the ‘gold standard’. This process is something NIC would likely want to assess.
- Page 90 of the self-study notes that an intentional/intrusive advising project is being piloted in order to address and increase student retention. This is a critically important program and NIC should consider assessing the numbers of students that are on academic probation.
- Data from the category of Student Development are absent from the indicators/measures under objective 2.
- Data from the category of Student Learning resources are absent from the indicators/measures under objective 2.
Data from the category of Health and Counseling are fully absent from the indicators/measures under objective 2.

It appears, from on-site interviews, that the institution is engaged in a continuous process of reviewing assessment methods related to Core Theme 1. Based on campus interviews, NIC intends to review the Student Success assessment plan and include additional objectives and indicators/measures. It is evident that there is strong and sincere interest at NIC in developing a robust assessment plan. Care should be taken to insure data is appropriate to the core theme, reflects accurate comparisons where warranted, and leads to the documentation of core theme progress and areas for improvement – simply adding additional indicators fails to address the appropriateness of measures and the lack of longitudinal trend lines.

The college’s five year instructional program review cycle has great potential for addressing assessment needs and implementation of Core Theme 1. It is also commendable that all Student Services areas completed their program reviews in a very short time. However, simple indicators/measures that show participation rates of programs fail to reflect either the quality of that participation or areas for improvement. A tracking program for program review recommendations is in place. It was noted that a small degree of inconsistency occurs across programs related to tracking how improvements are implemented and the program review “loop is closed”.

SLOA is charged with ensuring that program-level learning outcomes are established and assessed. Student Learning outcomes are not clearly defined in all programs. There is a lack of evidence that a holistic alignment of programs exists, and that planning, resource allocation, capacity, and other analysis are conducted to assess outcome and core theme fulfillment. The overall learning outcomes or “nine abilities” are clearly identified at the course level but inconsistently (or not at all) at the program or degree level. In interviews, it was determined that there is no an assessment tool available to determine whether graduating students achieve all of the adopted learning outcomes.

Evidence presented for data collection and use regarding resources forms a very limited data set for decision making to evaluation accomplishment of core theme objectives and/or programs and services. Assessments exist at different levels throughout Core Theme 1. Establishing outcomes and indicators better aligned with the Student Success Core Theme, supported by a complete and complementary strategic plan, will make core theme assessments more meaningful for planning, decision making, and resource allocation. It was found that Student Success core theme assessment analysis and findings have caused changes in the deployment of financial, facility, and information technology resources. It is unclear from evidence that these changes have resulted in improvements. Campus interviews indicate that NIC has not regularly and systematically reviewed its assessment processes given the multiplicity of changes in leadership.

Core Theme 2 – Educational Excellence

Planning: Core Theme 2 (Educational Excellence) aligns with the mission of the college as it pertains to meeting the educational needs of the students, employers, and communities through educational excellence and lifelong learning. The description of the college’s educational programs and planning processes suggests a rich environment for teaching and learning, with
faculty and staff who are dedicated and passionate about their work. Interviews conducted by the reviewers support NIC’s comments in the self-study that its curriculum is “well-ordered and diverse” and allows “students, faculty and staff to explore their interests and capabilities.”

While ample evidence of curricular planning and a focus on teaching was found at NIC, evidence that such planning is directly tied to the institution’s comprehensive plan was not consistently found. For example, careful planning is taking place to put a rigorous and regular program review in place for the 60 plus programs and degrees at the college, but the claim that this reporting will ensure “continuous monitoring of programs” and a “seamless method for tying program goals to strategic initiatives” was not evident in the written materials. Discussions with the administration and faculty suggested that planning is tied to interpretations of community demands and the potential for strong enrollment, but the selection of offerings is based primarily on institutional enrollment needs, and with insufficient evidence as to whether programs are aligned with and contribute to accomplishment of the core theme’s objectives.

The reviewers were unable to establish that planning for Core Theme 2 programs and services is guided by alignment with intended outcomes due to inconsistency between the objectives covered in the Self-Study and those in the 2012-2016 Strategic Plan Framework. Without confirmation of the relevant mission and core themes, consistent planning is neither possible nor verifiable.

A proposed Educational Master Plan has been developed by the college community and published in February 2013. The plan has not yet been fully distributed and has reached various members of the college community inconsistently. This Educational Master Plan is to serve as a guide to planning with respect to the core theme of Educational Excellence. The implementation of this plan will contribute to redefining the appropriate data for evaluating the achievement of the goals in this core theme.

In reviewing the measures from the current objectives in the self-study, reviewers found scarce evidence that previously-collected data serves as the basis for benchmarking, and there was insufficient rationale for the use of the percentage and percentile “expectations” that will determine whether planning for those objectives has been successful. The absence of a comprehensive, multi-year strategic plan with regard to resources precludes the ability of NIC to demonstrate that Educational Excellence core theme planning is consistent, aligned, and contributing to core theme accomplishments. Long-range resource planning documents must be created, consistent with a comprehensive plan, to align resources with future educational endeavors.

Assessment and Improvement: As noted in discussion of Core Theme 1, above, there are not enough data to show that there has been an ongoing systematic use of the indicators/measures for the core themes. The State of Idaho’s Board of Education has identified five strategies for state institutions of higher education that must largely inform decisions made by the college in its strategic planning around the core theme of educational excellence. The most aggressive of the goals approved by the State Board include increasing from 31% to 60% the number of Idahoans between ages 24-35 that possess either a degree or certificate at the college level. The initiative, Complete College Idaho, suggests specific pathways to be followed by all colleges, such as the
development of branch campuses, partnering with school districts, offering co-requisite courses in lieu of prerequisites, and reviewing placement processes.

The work that has been done on the draft Educational Master Plan provides a starting point for review of the current wording of the objectives and intended outcomes of Core Theme 2. The data that has been collected around the various enrollment figures, program demographics and viability review, and strengths and opportunities diagnoses will serve to initiate effective planning that has the support of the Board of Education. Evidence presented for data collection and use regarding resources forms a very limited data set for decision-making to evaluate accomplishment of Core Theme 2 objectives, program and service goals, and outcomes. Once the information has been updated into core theme objectives and adequate measurements devised, the institution will be in a position to disseminate results and use those results to effect improvement as the standard instructs.

There are many examples of effective evaluation systems for programs offered by NIC. The program review cycle that is in its beginnings promises to be a comprehensive look at each of the program offerings, and faculty clearly have a primary role in evaluation through the SLOA Committee and the contributions made via the department chairs. Another example is the ABE/GED program, which not only has an effective evaluation system, but is showing excellent outcomes with respect to both enrollments and completions, exceeding both the state and federal expectations in the last year. All indications are that NIC will succeed in implementing the program evaluations already designed and begin further implementation at this time.

The SLOA Committee is working within a carefully planned schedule of regular review of outcomes assessment for all of its constituencies, including plans for program improvement based on the three-year assessment cycle. The committee gave many examples of improvements that are in progress or already completed during the reviewers’ interviews. The reviewers did not find sufficient evidence that assessment evaluations and results are published and available to the college community, or that they lead to enhancement of student learning achievements. While student comments overwhelmingly support a strong, student-focused classroom experience, the data to support claims of instructional excellence were not apparent to the reviewers. Without such data, it is not possible for the institution to use results of student learning assessments to “inform academic and learning-support planning and practices.”

The institution demonstrates that Educational Excellence core theme assessment analysis and findings have caused changes in the deployment of financial, facility, and information technology resources to contribute to the achievement of program and service goals and outcomes, core theme objectives, and mission fulfillment. It is unclear from evidence that these changes have resulted in improvement.

Core Theme 3 - Community Engagement

Planning: The third component, or Core Theme, of NIC’s mission is to meet the diverse educational needs of employers and the communities served through a commitment to “Community Engagement”. This core theme aligns with the college’s Strategic Plan emphasis on “collaborative partnerships with businesses, organizations, community members, and educational institutions to identify and address changing educational needs.” Strategic objectives
encompass and expand upon the core theme objectives that are further delineated in the proposed Educational Master Plan. It is unclear to reviewers how this alignment actually constitutes the planning necessary to guide the selection of programs, services, and resources necessary to accomplish the core theme’s objective. Interviews with college personnel validate NIC’s own observation that establishing a clear relationship of the core themes to the college’s strategic directions, departmental planning, program planning, and outcomes assessment is a work in progress and not yet clearly articulated or understood at all levels of the college.

It is clear that community engagement is embedded into the culture of North Idaho College. The college is to be complimented on the numerous ways in which it serves its constituents such as:

- Delivering in-demand educational programs on campus, at its outreach centers, and through dual credit programs
- Providing short-term training to meet business and employer needs as well as community interest courses in support of life-long learning
- Encouraging and supporting students in volunteer activities that give back to the community
- Offering artistic and creative performances at the Schuler Performance Art Center;
- Giving time and expertise to local boards, advisory committees, chambers, etc.
- Leading summer sports camps and other activities that support the community’s youth
- Collaborating with and supporting reciprocal programs such as the NIC Children’s Center, Head Start, and the Area Agency on Aging

The Community Engagement Core Theme has one single objective “to establish and maintain collaborative community partnerships” and five measures: 1) Community Engagement Rubric; 2) Distance Learning Proportion of Credit; 3) Number of Course Offerings at NIC Outreach Centers and Other Off-Campus Sites; 4) Dual Credit Total Annual Credit Hours; and 5) Dollars Secured through the Development Department. At this point in time, the desired performance level is based on benchmarking with other similar institutions or through NIC trend data where national data is unavailable. It is unclear what the desired performance data actually represents and how meaningful planning can result. Interviews with staff indicate that there is a lack of understanding around the selected measures. Many commented that NIC is hoping that this year’s report will establish a baseline for future trends. Since the trend-line doesn’t yet exist, it is too soon to see any alignment of programs/services with fulfillment of outcomes.

Accomplishment of Core Theme 3’s one objective is heavily dependent on counting participation rates. The reviewers found evidence that NIC realizes the limitations of current measures and is seeking ways to establish stronger indicators. Measuring the impact of these programs and events on learning over time will result in more effective measures. The college is researching how to move beyond participation and satisfaction measures in some areas that support the Community Engagement Core Theme. Evidence is not provided to support the holistic evaluation of alignment, correlation, and integration of resources to achieve core theme objectives or program outcomes. Unconnected evidence is provided to support the adequacy or need for improvement of resources in specific areas.
Assessment and Improvement: The college is in the initial stages of engaging in ongoing systematic collection of data in relation to Core Theme 3’s one objective. Using one qualitative community engagement rubric (Measure 1), participation data has been captured. In addition, community needs assessment and the impacts and outcomes of engagement and outreach activities have been rated. NIC has exceeded its expectation that 70% of the total points have been met or exceeded. For Distance Learning Proportion of Credit Hours (Measure 2) NIC ranks 62% compared to national measures (NCCBP). Dual Credit Total Annual Credit Hours (Measure 4), Number of Course Offerings at Outreach Centers (Measure 3) and Dollars Secured (Measure 5) are rated as satisfactory using NIC Trends. While the data can be considered assessable and verifiable, the evaluator is unable to determine how meaningful it is in demonstrating accomplishment of the core theme objective.

There is evidence that key programs and services closely associated with achieving Core Theme 3 (Communications and Marketing, Outreach Programs, Dual Credit Program, Community and Government Relations, Athletics, Grant Development, Events and Reciprocal Programs) have been engaged in some review at the departmental level. As noted in the self-study and verified in interviews, these reviews have resulted in analysis and plans for improvement. However, while Instruction and Student Services have clearly identified program review processes in place, the evaluator found no evidence to suggest that the college engages in an effective system of evaluation of all its programs and services; that the institution evaluates holistically the alignment, correlation and integration of programs and services with respect to accomplishment of Core Theme 3; or that planning, resources, capacity and other analysis are holistically taking place in regards to outcomes and Core Theme 3 outcomes fulfillment.

While recognizing that the indicators and benchmarks were developed within the context of the short time frame between the Year One and Year Seven reports, the reviewers note that many of the measures may not provide meaningful data for evaluating accomplishment of Core Theme 3. It is unclear to the evaluator how the objective and measures identified for Core Theme 3 systematically inform planning and decision making for improvement.

The institution demonstrates that Community Engagement core theme assessment and analysis findings have caused changes in programs, services, and the deployment of resources. It is unclear from evidence that these changes have resulted in improvements.

Section Five – Mission Fulfillment, Adaptation, and Sustainability

As noted throughout this report, the institution fails to engage in an integrated, evidence-based planning process. Assessment measures are in place, but in several cases are not data-informed or carefully aligned with their respective core themes. Financial, capital, and educational planning are not yet fully developed; planning alignment could not be measured due to the lack of these major elements.

Priorities and projections in areas such as academic programming, budgeting, capital projects, and college expansion are not readily available. Institutional trend data exists, but it is unclear to
reviewers whether the college has analyzed trends and patterns to inform both planning and assessment efforts.

While the institution has engaged in planning and assessment efforts during a time of significant change and transition, these efforts are not adequate in providing evaluation results that define the future direction of the college and support review and, if necessary, revision of the mission, core themes, core theme objectives, goals, or intended outcomes of programs and services. In order to ascertain sustainability of college programs and operations, planning and assessment efforts must be clear, specific, reliable, and systematic.
Commendations

1. The employees of NIC are commended for their demonstrated commitment, care, and respect for students and their success.

2. Library and English faculty are commended for development of assessment practices related to information literacy that can serve as a model for other outcomes assessment efforts.

3. Physical Plant leadership and staff are commended for the implementation of environmental sustainability methods that save institutional resources and establish best practices.

4. NIC is commended for a high level of community engagement as reflected in efforts such as fine and performing arts offerings, customized workforce training, local volunteer projects, and summer events and activities.

5. NIC is to be commended for the establishment of effective employee professional development and wellness initiatives, including the adoption of staff sabbaticals.
Recommendations

1. While evidence of effort is apparent, the reviewers recommend the institution fully engage in integrated, comprehensive planning that offers opportunities for input by appropriate constituencies and is informed by the collection of clearly-defined data used to evaluate mission fulfillment. Such planning should include budget and capital projections that inform resource allocation and support core theme progress. It is also recommended that, through the planning process, the institution insure the creation of appropriate learning environments for all programs (including those at off-campus locations), wherever offered and however delivered, in order to effectively support student learning (Standard 1.B.2, Standard 1.B.2, Standard 2.C.1, Standard 2.D.1, Standard 2.F.2, Standard 2.F.5, and Standard 3.A).

2. The institution has engaged in a comprehensive process to create and revise college mission, vision, and values statements as well as define core themes. It is recommended that the design of each identified core theme be consistent with the institution’s mission, supported by the comprehensive plan, and informed by both clearly defined indicators and the regular collection and analysis of meaningful data (Standard 1.B.1, Standard 1.B.2).

3. It is recommended that the institution continue to refine its process of core theme assessment by collecting and using appropriately-defined data to evaluate fulfillment of its mission. The institution should regularly revise its assessment processes to ensure they appraise authentic achievements and yield meaningful results that lead to improvement (Standard 3.B.3, Standard 4.A.1, Standard 4.A.6, Standard 4.B.1).

4. It is recommended that the institution employ sufficient qualified personnel to maintain Library Services support and operations functions, insuring quality, adequacy, utilization, and security of library and information resources and services, including those provided through cooperative arrangements, wherever offered and however delivered. The institution, consistent with its mission and core themes, must provide access to library and information resources with an appropriate level of currency, depth, and breadth to support the institution’s mission, core themes, programs, and services. (Standard 2.B.1 and Standard 2.E.1, Standard 2.E.4).

5. It is recommended that the institution develop, publish widely, and follow an effective and clearly stated transfer-of-credit policy that maintains the integrity of programs while facilitating efficient mobility of students between institutions when completing their educational programs. Such a policy will ensure that adopted admission and placement policies guide student enrollment in courses and programs through an evaluation of prerequisite knowledge, skills, and abilities to assure a reasonable probability of student success (Standards 2.A.14 and Standard 2.A.16).