

# **Year One Peer-Evaluation Report**

**Clark College**  
**Vancouver, Washington**

**October 2011**

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

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## **I. Roster of Evaluators**

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## **II. Introduction**

In accordance with the revised accreditation process of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (hereinafter referred to as “the Commission”), this report provides an overview and review of Standard 1.A (The Mission) and Standard 1.B (Core Themes) for Clark College (hereinafter called “the College”). The Year One Peer-Evaluation Report examines the eligibility requirements, mission, and mission fulfillment. The report also provides an analysis of the Core Themes with identified objectives, indicators and targets, and supporting evidence provided by the College. Finally, this report evaluates the College’s work to address previous Recommendations provided by the Commission. The Peer-Evaluation Report provides collegial input on the quality and usefulness of the College’s Year One Self-Evaluation Report, and provides an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the College’s response to Standard 1.A and 1.B.

Clark College is a community college nestled in Vancouver, Washington, near historic Central Park. The second largest college in the 34 Washington state system of community and technical colleges, it serves residents of Washington Community College Service District #14 which draws students from Clark, Skamania, and west Klickitat counties.

Founded in 1933, Clark College has expanded to meet the ever-changing needs of its constituents and today offers approximately 100 different programs at a variety of locations. Clark College has worked to deepen partnerships with industry and workforce as well as to strengthen transfer partnerships with area universities to provide seamless avenues for degree completion.

Engaged in clarifying and deepening institutional commitment to the college’s mission, Clark College involved stakeholders across the college community in the development of a five-year Strategic Plan (2009-2014). The Strategic Plan identifies the college mission centrally and identifies five Core Themes, from which the work of the college originates. Since the spring 2010 focused interim accreditation site visit Clark College has been working on addressing the recommendation concerning assessment of learning outcomes for each of its degree and certificate programs. The College used the Recommendation as a springboard to action.

## **III. Assessment of Self-Evaluation Report and Supporting Materials**

The Evaluation Team recognizes and acknowledges the work of the College’s administration, faculty, staff, students and the Board of Trustees on addressing Standard 1, both sub-section 1.A and 1.B.

Clark College has engaged in a well-articulated process in developing its mission, Core Themes, and five-year Strategic Plan, all of which is captured in a carefully crafted, detailed, and informative Self-Evaluation Report. Charged with deepening a college-wide culture of assessment and a system of annual, continuous improvement, Clark College established a process that involved faculty, administrators, students, staff, and Board of Trustees. The Self-Evaluation Report describes the process, the stakeholders, the investment by the College, and the reallocation of resources to support the process. The Report is clear, sequenced and detailed, and provides significant materials in the Addenda as evidence supporting the Report.

#### **IV. Topics Addressed as an Addendum to the Self-Evaluation Report**

In response to the recommendation regarding program assessment received as a result of the 2008 ten-year evaluation, Clark College launched a system-wide review of its processes and practices. With a firm goal of rectifying the identified issues, the College convened a subcommittee from the Instructional Planning Team (IPT) to determine next steps. This committee, comprised of faculty, staff, and administrators, identified core issues, not the least of which was a variance across campus in defining “program.” The committee proposed a new definition of program (i.e., “area of study leading to a degree or certificate”) that was presented to IPT, approved, and communicated campus-wide.

##### **Recommendation:**

*While a timeline is in place and work has begun, it is recommended the college identify and publish the expected learning outcomes for each of its degree and certificate programs. Furthermore, it is recommended the college demonstrate, through regular and systematic assessment, that students who complete their programs, no matter where or how they are offered, have achieved these outcomes. (Standard 2.B.2 and Policy 2.2)*

As a result of the strategic planning process, the College developed an annual, continuous improvement process. The College developed a scorecard used to assess the College’s progress in accomplishing its five-year goals and the scorecard results were then used to identify areas of improvement.

The College convened a subcommittee of IPT (Instructional Planning Team) and charged it with examining general education learning outcomes in the Associate of Arts (AA) degree. The work of this committee was instrumental in establishing AA degree learning outcomes which then became the starting point for identifying general learning outcomes in CTE (Career Technical Education) programs. This work led to the development of outcomes tied to distribution areas of the AA degree. With this work, the College discovered that consistent program reviews needed to be accomplished regularly, which heretofore had not been. The College invested in release time of two full-time faculty members to serve as “outcome-assessment liaisons” to work with faculty to develop learning outcomes and assessments. Investing in this work college-wide, and empowering the faculty leaders to conduct this work, resulted in substantial progress in ensuring compliance college-wide.

Additionally and in a further effort to support this work, the College invested in several all-day, all-faculty trainings and professional development to enhance faculty practice and understanding. The work of the outcome assessment liaisons resulted in both an increase in faculty understanding and buy-in, and an increase in the number of programs campus-wide that had well-developed and identified outcomes. Subsequent compliance and assessment progress for the college is reported in Appendix F of the Self-Evaluation Report, entitled “Assessment Progress Update for CTE Programs.” While not all programs achieved full compliance, the amount of work that was accomplished in this systematic, organic process reflects a commitment on the part of the College to invest time, money, and resources into ensuring full implementation.

An additional faculty training opportunity supported by the College and underscoring its commitment to a culture of continuous improvement, was the all-day workshops that occurred

during spring break of 2011. A total of forty-seven full-time faculty attended these workshops to learn about the “student-centered college,” how assessment is an essential element in determining student success, how various teaching/learning styles and strategies impact student success and effective assessment, as well as about linkages between programs college-wide. The investment in this kind of all-campus training reflects the deep commitment of Clark College to ensuring mission fulfillment.

These actions on the part of the College answered Recommendation 1 of the spring 2010 Focused Interim Report.

## **V. Eligibility Requirements**

### **Eligibility Requirement 2 - Authority**

*The institution is authorized to operate and award degrees as a higher education institution by the appropriate governmental organization, agency, or governing board as required by the jurisdiction in which it operates.*

Clark College addressed Eligibility Requirement 2 (Authority) in its Report, citing the Community College Act of 1967 (revised as the Community and Technical Act of 1991), and the Revised Code of Washington (RCW 28B.50). The Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) authorizes Clark College to operate as a higher education institution to award degrees. Further authorization is delineated in RCW 25B.50.140.

### **Eligibility Requirement 3 - Mission and Core Themes**

*The institution’s mission and core themes are clearly defined and adopted by its governing board(s) consistent with its legal authorization, and are appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education. The institution’s purpose is to serve the educational interests of its students and its principal programs lead to recognized degrees. The institution devotes all, or substantially all, of its resources to support its educational mission and core themes.*

Clark College meets Eligibility Requirement 3 by clearly identifying the College’s mission and Core Themes in its 2009-2014 Strategic Plan, approved on June 15, 2009 and implemented on July 1, 2009 by the Clark College Board of Trustees.

## **VI. Standard One: Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations**

### **Standard 1.A - Mission**

The mission statement of Clark College states that “Clark College provides opportunities for diverse learners to achieve their educational and professional goals, thereby enriching the social, cultural and economic environment of our region and the global economy.” Developed by a broad-based group of constituents from every part of the college community, and approved by the Board of Trustees, the mission is published widely. It is evidenced in the 2011-12 College Catalog on the front inside cover of the book – easily identified, clearly articulated. This publication includes the Vision, Mission, and Core Themes that guide the college. This same

information can be easily located on the Clark College website which also expands each Core Theme with objectives that hold the college accountable to its students and constituents.

The Clark College mission statement drives the work and planning of Clark College. As the foundation for developing its 2009-2014 Strategic Plan, Clark College used the mission statement to steer the development of its five Core Themes. Driven by the recommendations outlined in the Focused Interim Report, the College worked to create an environment that was assessment driven within a culture of continuous improvement. They have made remarkable progress in a short period of time.

Based on the tenets set out in the College's mission statement, Clark College worked to provide greater opportunities for diverse learners to achieve their educational and professional goals. The process used to identify and measure their work was a four-step continuous improvement process that calls for: Plan, Do, Assess, Improve.

The College developed Core Themes that encompass its mission, objectives for each Core Theme, indicators for each objective, and desired outcomes. A scorecard was developed to help measure mission fulfillment. The scorecard is based on indicators, desired outcomes, and evaluative scores based on which the College makes decisions on which areas need further attention and improvement. The scorecard rates objectives by comparing the indicators to desired outcomes. The Evaluation Team found the scorecard easy to understand. Each indicator is rated from 1 to 3 as follows:

3. Meets or exceeds desired outcome
2. Does not meet desired outcome
1. Does not meet desired outcome, well below

Clark College defines mission fulfillment as attaining an evaluative rating of 80% for all desired outcomes within each of the five Core Themes. For each Core Theme dividing the sum of all numeric evaluative scores by the total possible points.

The Self-Evaluation Report provides sufficient detail to conceptualize this scorecard with a visual to aid the reader in understanding what at first read may appear complex. The strategy and formula for determining continuous improvement for each indicator in the five Core Themes shows the thorough planning that Clark College used to develop an effective system and process for measuring mission fulfillment. The Evaluation Team found the definitions of the scores fairly straightforward, however, the College provided no indication of the definition of "well below" desired outcome.

### *Compliments*

1. The Evaluation Team compliments the College on the development of a systematic approach to ensuring that the mission of the College guides every decision at every level.
2. The Evaluation Team compliments the College on the development of an easy to read graphic organizer used to detail the Core Themes, objectives, indicators, and desired outcomes; and on the development of the scoring mechanism used to measure mission fulfillment.

### **Standard 1.B - Core Themes**

Clark College developed five Core Themes to ensure mission fulfillment. These Core Themes include: (1) focus on learning; (2) expand access; (3) foster a diverse college community; (4) respond to workforce needs; and (5) enhance college systems. Objectives, indicators, and desired outcomes were developed for each Core Theme that will be measured continuously for progress toward mission fulfillment using the scorecard established. The College developed 19 objectives, and each objective has one or more indicators. Objectives are appropriate for the Core Themes. Indicators selected, for the most part, are meaningful, assessable, and verifiable. The Self-Evaluation Report did not always provide granular detail to understand the rationale or definitions used. For example, the College did not elaborate on why it selected the fixed three year mark for completing all degrees or certificates, and whether the three year completion data is available for degrees and certificates at the National Community College Benchmark Schools. It appears that the College has more control over some indicators and desired outcomes than others. For example, percent of students receiving financial aid depends on the number of students meeting initial and continued eligibility criteria. In some cases the indicators do not appear to fully measure the corresponding objective. For example, in the case of Objective 11 (Identify and support high-demand workforce needs), student placement is included as an indicator but no indicator appears to directly measures whether the needs have been met. In some cases the College seems to rely heavily on satisfaction data. The indicators under some objectives are not as well developed as others. For example, in the case of Objective 13, submitting grant proposals with regional partnerships and the percent of completers who obtain jobs within nine months do not appear, by themselves, to provide a strong measure for “to establish, maintain, and expand partnerships that support workforce needs.”

### *Compliments*

1. The Evaluation Team compliments the College on the process in which it engaged constituents in developing Core Themes, objectives, indicators, and desired outcomes.
2. The Evaluation Team compliments the College on the development of a scorecard that evaluates mission fulfillment and tracks and assesses continuous improvement in each Core Theme.



## **VII. Summary**

Clark College engaged in a broad and systemic process for deepening institutional commitment to the College's mission and its newly developed Core Themes. The work undertaken by the College in developing the five-year Strategic Plan (2009-2014) explicitly identifies the mission and operationalizes it both institutionally and at the unit level. The College accomplished a tremendous amount of work in a short period of time in developing objectives, indicators, and targets, and also engaging faculty in training to ensure assessment-driven processes. The work of the College deepened the commitment to a culture of continual improvement through not only the identification of objectives, indicators, and desired outcomes, but also through developing a system to measure progress toward these objectives and Core Themes. The scorecard that the College developed is clear and easy to conceptualize. The strategy and formula for determining continuous improvement for each objective of the five Core Themes reveals the depth of planning and follow-through in which the College engaged.

## **VIII. Commendations and Recommendations**

### **Commendation**

1. The Evaluation Team commends Clark College on the process in which it engaged its constituents in the development of Core Themes, objectives, indicators, and desired outcomes. (1.B1. and 1.B.2)

### **Recommendation**

1. The Evaluation Team recommends that Clark College continue to review and revise its indicators and corresponding desired outcomes to ensure that they are meaningful, assessable, and verifiable, and allow for the evaluation of the accomplishment of objectives and Core Themes. (Standard 1.B.2)