

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT

Renton Technical College

Renton, WA

October 26, 2010

Prepared by

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*A Confidential Report Prepared for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
that Represents the Views of the Evaluator*

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Introduction

Renton Technical College's last full scale evaluation by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities occurred in 2003. The Commission reaffirmed accreditation, but requested a progress report in fall 2004 to address Recommendations 3, 4, and 6. This progress report was submitted and accepted by the Commission in December 2004.

The Commission also required a focused interim report and visit in fall 2006 to address General Recommendations 1, 2, and 5 of the fall 2003 comprehensive evaluation report. The College hosted an evaluator and one General Recommendation was provided in the Focused Interim Report. The Commission reaffirmed accreditation on the basis of the focused interim evaluation.

A substantive change request, approval for an AAS-T in Registered Nursing, was submitted in September 2006.

In October 2008 two evaluators visited Renton Technical College for a Regular Interim evaluation. The six General Recommendations from the 2003 comprehensive evaluation report as well as the one General Recommendation from the 2006 focused interim evaluation report were reviewed. One General Recommendation was provided in the Regular Interim Report. The Commission reaffirmed accreditation on the basis of the evaluation. The Commission requested that the College prepare a focused interim report and host a Commission representative in fall 2010 to address Recommendation 1 of the fall 2008 Regular Interim Report.

The Commission approved a substantive change request, change from clock-hour based system to a credit hour based system, in July 2009.

On October 26, 2010, one evaluator visited the College. This report includes an evaluation of the General Recommendation from the Regular Interim Report as well as a review of the transition from clock hours to credit hours.

Focused Interim Report Renton Technical College

Focused Interim Report and Support Materials

Renton Technical College's Focused Interim Report specifically addressed the recommendation from the October 2008 Regular Interim Report. It also addressed the review of the transition from clock hours to credit hours. In order to fully understand how the strategic plan is being implemented the evaluator requested a series of meetings to be set up with staff of the Student Services and Finance and Administration divisions as well as some additional documents to be provided during the visit. All materials were present when the evaluator arrived.

Evaluation Methods

The evaluator met a member of the Board of Trustees, administrators and support staff. A list of those interviewed is attached. The evaluator also reviewed the Regular Interim Report, the Focused Interim Report, budget documents, Board minutes related to presentations regarding strategic planning efforts, and information on the College's website.

Actions Taken Regarding 2008 Recommendation

Recommendation 1. *The evaluation committee recommends that the college take action to implement its strategic planning activity per its published timelines and to complete the strategic plans for its Student Services and Finance and Administration divisions to ensure the dynamic and systematic connectivity and evaluation of human and physical resources consistent with the overall plan. (Standard 1B).*

The college has made strategic planning a more visible priority since the 2008 recommendation was made. In spring 2009, issues arose between the president and the Board, resulting in his termination. Several vacancies also occurred on the Board. An interim president was hired, and he has since become the permanent president. The Board is now up to its full membership of five. Working with the president, the Board is working towards a Carver model of governance which has helped to redefine its role as one of a policymaking body rather than one involved in managing the college. The Board member the evaluator interviewed discussed how these changes have helped to discipline members in their relationships with staff. He also reported on the retreat the board held and the reports provided by the three vice presidents regarding their efforts towards meeting the goals of the college's strategic plan.

The three vice presidents discussed tangible evidence in their areas related to the goal indicators. Even with budget cuts, access has remained a high priority so having the plan helped to guide decisions related to what instructional areas would be reduced or eliminated. With the elimination of the Student Success Center, the Student Services area worked with faculty to develop a plan for continuing assistance in the math lab. Although unable to accomplish the same success with writing assistance, they continue to work on this area. The plan has helped to identify what is more realistic in terms of operations of the bookstore and catering so these areas can contribute revenue to the general operations of the college. The plan has also helped to

identify areas where cross training can occur, and the annual reviews of the plan are contributing to the overall feeling of accomplishment as the college meets its mission.

Both the Student Services and Finance and Administration areas have developed plans as requested; however, the processes used by the two groups were different and have had different results.

The Student Services staff interviewed described how they met several times for brainstorming sessions, and ultimately decided they needed to have a longer period of time to make their plan a reality. They met in a retreat format away from the campus and developed short-term and long-term goals based on the college's overall plan. This evaluator was able to easily tie their plan to the college's overall strategic plan. They have completed one cycle of reviewing their annual plan. Staff members stated developing their plan helped to make them feel more cohesive with the whole college, i.e., everyone is on the same page.

The Finance and Administration process was less participatory, and as a result, the staff was less articulate in their overall knowledge about the plan. The staff in this area remembered brainstorming ideas which were then summarized in a plan by the then vice president in this area. She has since left, and a new vice president has taken leadership in this area. Some of the employees reported using the plan to assist them in writing their self-evaluations for their annual performance reviews, but the staff in this area did not express the sense of cohesiveness as was expressed by the Student Services staff. Also while the evaluator was able to identify elements of the plan and tie them to the overall strategic plan, it was not as easily aligned with the overall plan as was the Student Services plan.

Overall the college has made good progress on this recommendation. Two interdepartmental committees, the Institutional Effectiveness Team and the Strategic Planning and Oversight Team, have been developed to ensure the college stays on schedule with its planning processes. The leadership of the college, along with the institutional researcher, expressed the challenges associated with aligning the current strategic plan and the new concept of core themes as a part of the revised accreditation process. However, with the leadership in place at the college, they are working to make this a successful transition.

Commendations and Concerns. The College is to be commended 1) for its work on strategic planning activities overall while undergoing significant changes in leadership at the president and Board level and 2) for preparing the strategic plans for its Student Services and Finance and Administration divisions as requested in the October 2008 Regular Interim Report. Specifically, in the Student Services area, the processes to develop and review its plan has engaged staff and resulted in an acknowledgement of accomplishment and a feeling of more connection among the various divisions of the college.

While plans have been developed, it is recommended that the college continue working to align the Student Services and Finance and Administration plans with the overall college plan. In addition, it is recommended that the staff in the Finance and Administration area in these processes become more engaged in the process. It is also recommended that plans to develop a separate information technology plan be implemented.

Review of Clock Hours to Credit Hours Transition

The transition from clock hours to credit hours was well planned and has had positive impacts on the instructional programs and students. Planning started over a year in advance of this transition, and the college contacted two other technical colleges who had made this transition to learn from their experiences. This planning gave the staff time to consider issues that might be unique to Renton, to determine the impact of the change on the college's revenue, and to develop a communication plan for students to lessen the impact on them. As of July 1, 2010, the transition is almost 100% completed, and the staff is prepared to handle the occasional exceptions that may arise.

Some of the positive impacts of the transition have included better accountability for instructors, more financial aid available for students and use of a common course numbering system allowing for easier transfer for students. It provided an opportunity to implement some new processes, and it has added to the credibility of the programs of the college since most external populations have a better understanding of credit hours than clock hours.

Overall, the college has successfully implemented this change.

Commendations

The College is to be commended for its thoughtful planning for the transition from clock hours to credit hours. As of July 1, 2010, almost all courses have been successfully transitioned, and it has had a beneficial effect on instructional programs, students and departmental processes.

**Renton Technical College
Regular Interim Report
Individuals Interviewed**

Board of Trustees

Tyler Page

Administrative Team

Steve Hanson, President

Jon Pozega, Vice President, Student Services

Melinda Merrell, Vice President, Administration and Finance

Marty Heilstedt, Vice President for Instruction

Student Services Staff

Ha Nguyen, Counselor

Sherry Holmes, Counselor

Victoria Wang, Counselor

Karma Forbes, Counselor

Kathy Chavers, Public Information

Jane Winkler, Counselor

Michelle Iko, Career Services

Ted Schwarz, Counselor

Becky Riverman, Director of Admissions and Registration

Debbie Solomon, Financial Aid Director

David Grant, Outreach Coordinator

Celva Boon, Opportunity Grant

Yeumie Theong, Assistant Director Financial Aid

Finance and Administration Staff

Jamie Williams, Executive Director, Foundation

Mary Kay Wegner, Information Technology Director

Nancy Violante, Director of Financial Services

Shelley Hall, Director of Child Care

Doug Medbury, Associate Dean Culinary Arts/Director Foodservice

Jose Perdomo, Bookstore Manager

Robert Morrow, Custodial Manager/Night Manager

Barry Baker, Director of Plant Operations

Institutional Research

Chris Johnson, Director