

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A REGULAR INTERIM REPORT

**Bellingham Technical College
Bellingham, Washington**

October 19-20, 2009

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

**Evaluation Committee Report
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Introduction

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities conducted a full-scale evaluation at Bellingham Technical College in Bellingham, Washington, during the fall of 2004. As a result of the committee report, the Commission reaffirmed accreditation in January of 2005 but requested a progress report in the spring of 2007 to address general recommendations 1 and 2 of the 2004 Evaluation Committee Report. In August, 2007, the Commission accepted the report.

Mr. Dennis Gill and Ms. Susan Goff conducted the current Regular Interim Evaluation on October 19-20, 2007. The College's Interim Evaluation was thorough in responding to the suggested outlined items. Supporting documentation was referenced in the report and/or provided on-site. The evaluators were able to meet with the college president, key administrators, the President's Council, the Library Director, full-time faculty, adjuncts, and key support staff. Nearly eighty people were involved in these various interviews on campus. The evaluators reviewed various reports, planning and assessment documents, faculty evaluation procedures, applicable college policies and publications, and other documents.

The evaluators wish to acknowledge the hospitality and assistance provided by the Bellingham Technical College staff in arranging materials, appointments, and other logistics.

Part A: Recommendations from the 2004 Full-Scale Report

Recommendation 1: The committee recommends that the College completes the clock hour to credit hour conversion so that the award of credit is based on clearly understood criteria, clear distinctions between credit/non-credit and degree/non-degree and so that the College is able to equate its learning experiences using practices common to institutions of higher education (Standard 3C and Standard 2A6).

The evaluation team found the conversion from clock hours to credit hours essentially complete. BTC has gone through a systematic and collaborative process to resolve technical and curricula issues associated with the transition. Transferability has been enhanced by uncoupling related instruction components into state recognized common course numbering. Breaking programs into sequences of courses has also facilitated new course articulations with other institutions. BTC has established a task force to evaluate and improve additional student advising tools and processes that are needed due to the change to credit. The College published schedule has been modified to separate credit and non-credit offering into different sections providing a clear distinction for students pursuing degrees.

Recommendation 2: The committee recommends that the College evaluate all categories of faculty in accordance with Policy 4.1, including use of multiple indices (Policy 4.1).

In addressing Standard 4.A.5 and Policy 4. 1, Bellingham Technical now has a very comprehensive policy and procedure on faculty evaluation. Following the 2004 Comprehensive Evaluation, the College formed a Faculty Evaluation Oversight & Professional Development Committee, which was composed of three faculty and three administrators. The committee's

mission involved examining the faculty evaluation model that was in place and then determining where changes and improvements were needed.

As a result of the committee's recommendations, a systematic faculty evaluation process with multiple indices was instituted for the three faculty groups (probationary tenure, post tenure, and part time/adjunct). The policy ensures teaching effectiveness, a collegial process, student input as a valued component of the process, and administrative responsibility for the professional and ethical behavior of its faculty. The evaluator found that most faculty members and administrators understood the process and followed it diligently. Also, to ensure that the process is followed and that faculty members are not overlooked, the College assigned a half-time program assistant to track and manage probationary and post-tenure faculty evaluations and to gather student evaluations on all faculty. A summative report is signed by the faculty, committee faculty, student representative, and administrator and kept locked in the faculty member's file in the vice president of instruction's office. The evaluator was impressed with the comprehensiveness and standardization of the process, even though some adjuncts didn't understand their role in the evaluation process as well as they should (4.A.9). However, for the most part, full time faculty, adjuncts, and administration felt that the process worked well, was substantive, and comprehensive, and all the faculty members, that were interviewed, agreed that the process had improved their teaching. Overall, there is a clear, positive working relationship between the administration and the faculty in the evaluation process.

Bellingham Technical College fosters an environment that protects and respects academic freedom. The Collective Bargaining Agreement clearly outlines the academic freedom and professional rights and responsibilities of all faculty members.

The evaluator found that the College meets and exceeds the requirements set in Standard Four and policy 4.1.

Part B: Recent Changes

Standard One

BTC's planning and effectiveness efforts continue to be strong and well understood throughout the College community. Effectiveness indicators have been established for all functional areas that are routinely analyzed and acted upon for needed improvement.

Standard Two

New Degrees and Certificates

BTC has added several new degrees and certificates, primarily within health related fields. Faculty actively engages in recruiting local employers to serve on advisory committees for all curricula changes. A thorough labor market analysis is conducted for each new program. The

College routinely leverages grant opportunities to assist with startup costs and adequately staffs each new instructional program.

Discontinued Degrees/Certificates

Low enrollment has prompted BTC to review and, ultimately, move to discontinue three degree programs since the last full scale evaluation visit. Faculty, administration, and local employers work together to implement improvement plans prior to degree discontinuation. Once slated for discontinuation, BTC works with existing students to complete program coursework.

Educational Program Outcomes, Student Assessment of Outcomes, and Use of Results of Educational Assessment in Planning

Outcomes and student assessments have been successfully established at the program level. BTC uses assessment data to justify and prioritize project and equipment requests. While the faculty is well-versed in program level outcomes and assessment, more work needs to occur in developing outcomes and valid assessments at the course level. Sample syllabus was inconsistent in the use of a common language and measurable outcomes.

Standard Three

The student services administration, staff, and faculty have implemented many enhanced and expanded services. The addition of key personnel in workforce funding and career services has led to the establishment of a successful one stop funding center and significant expansion of tutoring and testing services. New career exploration sessions, an early alert system, and the implementation of a Student Behavior Awareness Team are all exemplary practices.

Standard Four

The stability of the faculty is dramatized by the low turn-over rate of personnel. A vast majority of the indicators paint a picture of genuine workplace satisfaction. Bellingham Technical College has increased its full-time faculty from 43 in 2004 to 63 today. The College has converted several adjuncts' positions in departments like mathematics, science, and culinary arts to full-time positions. The evaluator found that faculty members genuinely feel included in advising, curriculum design, governance, and budgeting. Faculty members commented positively on the open-door policy of the current administration and the transparency in the budgetary process. Overall, faculty members seem quite content with their workload, compensation, evaluation process, and administrative support.

Standard Five

The Bellingham Technical College Library has a well-defined purpose that directly supports the mission of the College. The interviewer found that the library director and her staff are aware of their role in supporting the College and take this responsibility very seriously. Several faculty members, including both adjunct and full-time, commented on the library staffs commitment to providing quality service and the necessary resources needed to make their students successful. The library staff is working to develop the “ability of students, faculty, and staff to use the resources independently and effectively” (5.B.2). Furthermore, even though BTC’s Library is very limited in space, the staff has done a remarkable job creating an organized environment that is conducive to academic success. The plan to move the library to the new Campus Center Building when completed will provide the library with the additional computer and resource space that is now lacking.

Standard Six

Bellingham Technical College operates under an effective governance system. The entire campus community, including administration, faculty, staff, and students are encouraged to participate in a variety of decision-making committees. The evaluation team was impressed with the administration’s commitment to creating an atmosphere of collaborative decision-making and open communication with all college constituencies. Interviews with faculty and staff indicate that there is satisfaction with their level of involvement and participation in the college governance system. The quarterly “Town Hall” meetings, budget process, and college intranet system were all mentioned as positive components of the BTC’s governance culture.

Standard Seven

Bellingham Technical College’s budget process is clearly linked to its strategic plan (7.A). Departments are assigned a “budget authority,” who is responsible for developing and communicating budgetary needs. These departmental representatives complete a budget template, link their requests to the strategic plan, and then submit their requests to their appropriate administrator. These requests are then compiled, summarized, and submitted for final approval by the President’s Council. After initial screening by the President’s Council, departments are also given the opportunity make a brief presentation regarding their requests to a cross-departmental budget committee during a one to two day meeting. Funding sources include the operating budget, federal and state grants, and foundation fundraising. Faculty, staff, and administrators praised this system for its fairness and transparency.

Standard Eight

BTC’s Master Plan is consistently being updated to support the College’s goals and priority initiatives. The recently completed 48,500 square foot Morse Center and soon-to-be started 74,000 square foot Campus Center are examples of BTC’s commitment to updating facilities that are no longer adequate or safe to house its many technical programs. The building of the Campus Center will involve leveling four out-dated buildings, and the administration seems to have a strong plan in place to make this process as unobtrusive as possible to campus life.

Standard Nine

Evidence was found that Bellingham Technical College subscribes to high ethical standards. This commitment can be found in the goals stated in the strategic plan: “BTC will demonstrate to its constituents the effective, efficient, ethical, and strategic use of all resources.” The Student Code of Conduct, the Student Grievance Procedure, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Policy have all been revised recently to better promote institutional integrity (9.A.2).

Concluding Statement

It is clear that Bellingham Technical College remains a solid, high quality institution, providing valuable service to the community. The College has made great strides in responding to the Recommendations included in the 2004 Full-Scale Evaluation. In this context, the following commendations and recommendations are offered.

Commendations:

1. Bellingham Technical College is to be commended for leadership in implementing a governance system that actively involves faculty, staff, and students in decision-making processes. The leadership team is to be applauded for creating a climate that “facilitates cooperative working relationships, promotes coordination within and among organizational units, and encourages open communication and goal attainment” (6.C.6).
2. BTC is to be commended for its innovation in student services. Successful efforts have been made to stretch a small staff through redesigning work processes to be more efficient while creatively expanding and leveraging services available to students (3.B.6).

Recommendation:

1. While Bellingham Technical College has done substantial work with course-level and program-level outcomes, some additional work needs to be done to ensure that all outcomes are measurable using a common language and format (Policy 2.2. & 2.A.4).