

*Prepared for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities*

A FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT

**Seattle Pacific University
Seattle, Washington**

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Prepared by

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INTRODUCTION

Following the Comprehensive Visit to Seattle Pacific University in spring of 2007, the Commission found that the institution did not meet the criteria for accreditation with regard to Recommendations 2, 3, 4, and 6. The Commission found that Recommendations 1 and 5 were areas where the University was substantially in compliance with Commission criteria, but in need of improvement. The Commission required Seattle Pacific University to take appropriate action to ensure that these Recommendations were addressed and resolved within the prescribed two-year period. A Focused Interim Report and a visit were required for fall 2008.

Seattle Pacific University's Interim Report addressed each of the Recommendations from the Comprehensive Evaluation Report. The Visit addressed Recommendations 1, 2, and 4 in interviews.

Table of Contents

INSTITUTION'S REPORT AND SUPPORT MATERIALS	1
METHODS USED	1
INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED	1
ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION	
RECOMMENDATION ONE – PLANNING AND EFFECTIVENESS	2
RECOMMENDATION TWO – STUDY ABROAD	3
RECOMMENDATION FOUR – STUDENT SERVICES	4
CONCLUSION	5
COMMENDATION AND RECOMMENDATION	5

EVALUATION OF THE INSTITUTION'S REPORT AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

The Focused Interim Report clearly stated the actions taken in response to all of the Recommendations. The Report was sent to the Evaluator in both print and electronic form and was found to be both adequate and accurate while being concise. Copies of the Report had been provided to the people who were interviewed. All of those interviewed were knowledgeable about the issues discussed.

The Evaluator is appreciative of the hospitality of the campus, especially by the provisions that made it possible for her to effectively and efficiently explore the issues. The exhibits, which covered all the Recommendations, were well organized and clearly labeled.

METHODS USED

The Evaluator requested interviews with the administrators responsible for the areas covered in Recommendations 1, 2, and 4. Interviews were requested and scheduled with faculty members on the Faculty Budget and Stewardship Committee and Studies Abroad Task Force. Interviews were requested and scheduled with both undergraduate and graduate students. The Evaluator met with the new Coordinator of the Studies Abroad Office and with the Registrar in addition to the Director of the Health Center and the Director of the Counseling Center.

In order to meet with graduate students, interviews began on Thursday evening. The President, Academic Vice President, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Associate Vice President for Business and Planning participated in the initial meeting on Thursday at 5 pm. The Evaluator then met with students who were on campus for an evening class. The rest of the interviews were held on Friday.

INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

Dr. Philip Eaton, President

Dr. Les Steele, Vice President for Academic Affairs

Dr. Cynthia Price, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Accreditation Liaison Officer

Craig Kispert, Associate Vice President for Business and Planning

Dr. Jeffrey Jordan, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean, Office of Student Life

Dr. Gary Karns, Professor of Marketing, Member, Faculty Budget & Stewardship Committee

Ruth Adams, University Registrar

Dr. Doug Downing, Associate Professor Economics, Member, Study Abroad Task Force

Jean Brown, Director, Student Health Center

Dr. Steve Maybell, Director, Student Counseling Center

Gail DeBell, Study Abroad Coordinator

Members of Special Education Assessment Class (EDSP 4651) consisting of 8 graduate students

and approximately 6 undergraduate students from 6:00 – 6:15 pm, Thursday, October 16. Professor Pamela Harris left the room while I conducted the interview. Undergraduate Students (all seniors): Peer Advisors – Sarah Schooley, Teylar Greer, Kristi Moore and Student Government and Budget Representatives – Joel VanderHoek and Anna Carlson

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Committee recommends that planning processes, including the preparation of budgets, involve appropriate constituencies to include students, staff, faculty, administration and Board members in a more interactive mode of shared decision-making. (Standard 1B.3)

The Committee's report indicated two major areas of concern. First was a concern with the vertical structure of the reporting system from the various committees and the lack of conversations among various constituencies that would be part of a more horizontal structure. Second was that more deans and faculty wanted to be involved in the budget development process and actively included in intra- and cross-discipline assumption discussions.

All components of the University are now involved in budget development much earlier in the process. The President was very intentional about providing open time for questions and comments during forums on planning and about soliciting comments and questions from faculty and staff to the paper that was presented. The President gave the Evaluator two specific examples where input from the community had modified planning. The most significant was a change in the plans for a new building on campus which was modified to include an auditorium and classroom space. A student described the same scenario at a separate meeting with the Evaluator.

The President has been more available to faculty leaders through informal Breakfast Conversations. The academic deans now meet with the President's Cabinet to provide input on the emerging budget.

The new faculty Committee for Budget and Stewardship was described as having a different mission than the previous Budget Committee and views itself as a conduit to the faculty. The faculty was reported as being very appreciative of the President's willingness to listen to them. These reports of faculty satisfaction came from interviews and were based on interactions on the faculty web space in addition to the experiences of those interviewed. The current perception is that the President is listening to the faculty and that serious progress has been made. The situation was described as a culture adjustment that enabled more faculty input.

The President and Vice Presidents reported being appreciative of the new input and pleased that the need for adjustments had been brought to their attention.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Committee recommends that the University develop and implement appropriate procedures for its Study Abroad Programs. (Standard 2.G.12 and Policy 2.4)

The Recommendation about Studies Abroad can be placed into two main categories. One involves basic management, such issues as communication and publication of programs. The other involves oversight of the curriculum to ensure that it is consistent with on-campus quality. The decentralized nature of the existing programs, which are largely driven by faculty and student interests, makes both of these issues challenging. The Task Force for Studies Abroad has accurately identified critical issues for the program and is addressing each issue.

In response to the “management” issue, the University has created a Study Abroad Office, a position for a Study Abroad Coordinator and hired a person to fill the position who started this fall. The Coordinator reports to the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs. The person hired has excellent experience with the travel industry and a keen sense of the need for organization. As a person who previously worked for the University, she already has positive relationships on campus which bode well for the office she heads being fully utilized in the future. This position started in September so there was no way to accurately assess its impact. It is clearly a support position with no power of “oversight” but with a potential to benefit students seeking a studies abroad experience and faculty members leading one. The number of new forms that have been developed in such a short period of time is impressive, although many of these forms are still going through the approval process. The academic counselors, who are supervised by the Registrar’s Office, provide another source of valuable assistance to students who want a studies abroad experience.

The more difficult issue, and the one that will take more time to resolve, is ensuring that the curriculum offered abroad is of the same quality and that it is being assessed in the same manner as the curriculum on campus. Given the decentralized nature of the programs there is no assurance that the quality is consistent. Any new course or program must go through the Undergraduate Policies and Evaluation Committee, but once it has been approved there is no consistent oversight. The new Studies Abroad Office does not have this type of authority over the curricula.

In addition to these management issues, a Global Education Task Force is providing direction for the future by elucidating links between Global Education and the University’s mission. There are several different scenarios for the future that could include Studies Abroad being supervised by a new entity that evolves for the mission-linked focus on Global Education. These initiatives are impressive but do not relieve the institution of the immediate need to provide more oversight and quality control for this aspect of their curriculum.

Concern: All Study Abroad programs do not have the same academic oversight and assessment necessary to ensure that the quality of the offerings is the same as the campus programs.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Committee recommends that the University take necessary steps to make counseling and health services readily available in a timely manner to residential and commuter students, including full-time graduate students. (Standard 3.D.12)

The revision of the delivery model for counseling services and the stabilization of the number of students requesting services resulted in a decrease in the number of students being placed on a wait list in the year of the full evaluation and that pattern has continued. An additional 0.5 FTE therapist was added in the spring quarter last year resulting in no students on the wait list that quarter, which is the quarter with the highest demand for services. The University will continue to monitor the number of students being served during the fall to determine if it needs to add staffing in the spring term and has identified funding for such a position. Seattle Pacific University students receive discounted rates with off-campus providers and the University has an organized off-campus referral service.

The Evaluator clarified through interviews that students can receive immediate attention in a crisis situation. There is someone in the center (usually the director) who is not fully booked with appointments in order to be available for emergency services. The staff is fully trained to deal with the triage system, even to the extent of knowing when to interrupt another counseling session. Students in crisis are seen as soon as possible and frequently within the hour. If they are in the Center, they do not leave the Center before being seen.

Undergraduate students spoke highly of the care received through both the health center and counseling center. They were particularly appreciative of special programs to assist with issues such as relationship problems. Although they reported hearing that it got more difficult to receive care later in the term, none of them had direct experience with being denied access or knew of anyone who had been denied access. The Peer Advisors reported full support for their work that was available 24 hours a day for seven days a week. Two of the student advisors interviewed had had to deal with crises. In addition to feeling fully supported during the crisis they reported that each of them had received personal support to deal with her own emotional needs following the interventions.

Graduate students are provided health services on a pay-per-quarter basis if they access the system by going to the health center. Although graduate students are not provided counseling services on campus, they are provided with referrals. The Center does spend time with the graduate students explaining the referral system to them and helping them access care. The University has completed a cost/benefit analysis of the situation for graduate students and has evidence that on-campus care would be more expensive for the students than the care to which they can refer them in the Seattle area. Although the Graduate students interviewed had not used any of these services, they all agreed that they knew how and where to obtain the information about them.

The University responded to this Recommendation by re-evaluating its health care model and sharpening its decision-make processes. Recognizing the special concern for privacy because of

the presence of graduate students in its counseling center who should not provide care for other graduate students, the University has devised a policy for graduate students that is appropriate to the institution and its location in resource-rich Seattle. The Evaluator was unable to discover any dissatisfaction with the existing system or concern among the students about access.

CONCLUSION

The University used the Recommendations of the Full-Scale Evaluation as an opportunity to improve. The focus of this visit was Recommendations 1, 2, and 4. Recommendations 3, 5, and 6 were covered by the University's Report and Exhibits.

Recommendations 1 and 4 were addressed by immediate changes in processes and/or by better communication of information. The issues covered by Recommendation 2, Studies Abroad, are currently being addressed. The new Studies Abroad Office has only been staffed since September. The web site reflects major changes in organization and management as do the drafts of new forms designed for better management and communication. The Studies Abroad Task Force has identified and prioritized areas for action. Their task list is appropriate and comprehensive but their work, particularly in the area of curriculum, is just beginning.

COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendation

The Evaluator commends the President and the University for the positive manner in which they responded to the Recommendations of the 2007 Evaluation Committee using the insights of that evaluation to take a hard look at what they were doing and to sharpen communication in a way that enhanced their culture of conversation.

Recommendation

The Evaluator recommends that policies and procedures be developed to ensure that the criteria and policies for judging performance and assigning credit in study abroad programs is in accordance with prevailing standards and practices at the home institution and that where several institutions are involved with a single overseas institution or in a consortium, a common basis for determining grade equivalents exists. (Policy 2.4)