Year One Report

Standard One: Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

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Introduction

Skagit Valley College was established in 1926. The College began operating in an upstairs room in Mount Vernon High School, offering primarily academic courses. In 1941 some vocational programs were added, and in 1948 the College began offering general interest courses. Today, the College has two campuses and three centers. The main campus is located in Mount Vernon on a 100-acre site approximately 60 miles north of Seattle. The Whidbey Island Campus, located in Oak Harbor, was opened in 1970 in cooperation with Naval Air Station Whidbey Island. In 1973, the Navy transferred the property to Skagit Valley College. The South Whidbey Center is located in the town of Clinton on Whidbey Island. The San Juan Center, located in Friday Harbor, is accessible only by boat or air. Both centers offer academic courses, computer technology courses, and senior classes. A Business Resource Center in downtown Mount Vernon is co-located with the Economic Development Association of Skagit County, providing an important link between the college and the business community.

The College serves a predominately rural tri-county area (Skagit, Island, and San Juan counties) covering 2,118 square miles in northwest Washington State and a population of approximately 217,000.   For many of the district's residents, Skagit Valley College represents the only geographically and/or economically accessible post-secondary education option—an open door to quality academic transfer, professional-technical, and basic skills programs that provide a solid bridge to jobs and futures. According to data from the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM), the residents of the district take advantage of higher education opportunities, especially those in Skagit County where the participation rate of persons age 17-64 is 5% compared to the state average of 4.4%. Both Island and San Juan Counties have participation rates slightly below the state average. Approximately one-third of high school graduates who enroll in higher education in the year following graduation enroll at Skagit Valley College.

In fall 2010, the College served nearly 7000 students who generated 4,545 full-time equivalent students (FTES). Of the 6,500 students enrolled in credit courses, 44% were enrolled as transfer-seeking, 39% reported working toward professional-technical degrees or certificates, and 9% were taking basic skills courses. The remaining 8% of the students were enrolled at the college for personal fulfillment or similar reasons.

Fifty-four percent (54%) of the students enrolled in fall 2010 were attending part-time (less than 12 credits) and 59% were female. The average age of females was 30 while the average age for males was 28. Of the students enrolled in fall 2010, 156 were international students and 624 were enrolled as Running Start students (dual-enrolled in high school and college). The majority of the students were white (74%), 14% were Hispanic, and 5% identify themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander. African American students accounted for 2% of enrollments and 1% of the students were Native American.

Institutional Context

From 2008 to the present, there has been a 24% reduction in state support to the college. Led by the President and the Vice-President for Administrative Services, the President's Cabinet has done the hard work needed to reduce and realign college expenditures in response to significant budget reductions. Before final decisions were made, the proposed strategies were shared with the college community through numerous college and student budget forums, as well as special work sessions for the Board of Trustees. College core values and priorities were kept in view as budget reductions were taken. An unfortunate consequence of the state budget reductions is the considerable increase in the costs to students of attending college.

Despite the ongoing budget reductions, the college continues to be engaged in a variety of activities in support of increasing student retention and completion, both in general and for students who are underprepared. The improved retention of students enrolled in the *Counseling-Enhanced Developmental Learning Communities* during the first two years of this initiative led the college to add a counseling component to developmental learning communities and expand this model. Starting fall 2010, *College Success Skills* courses are being linked with classes that have a traditionally high enrollment of new students and lower than average success rates. In addition, Skagit has continued its participation in the *AVID (Advancement via Individualized Determination)* post-secondary pilot project, which will assess the efficacy of specific student success strategies, used thus far in secondary settings, at the post-secondary level.

The implementation of the state-wide Student Achievement Initiative for Washington's community colleges has provided an accountability framework that the college has used to measure student progress and completion. The table below indicates measures and the college's performance based on Student Achievement data.

	Basic Skills	College Readiness	1st 15 Credits	1st 30 Credits	Quantitative/ Computation	Certificate, Degree, Apprenticeships	Total Points
2006-07	1,119	2,391	1,611	1,137	778	595	7,631
2007-08	1,464	2,294	1,619	1,230	773	641	8,021
2008-09	1,749	2,403	1,699	1,294	859	554	8,558
2009-10	1,508	2,914	1,994	1,498	1,028	615	9,557

It is worth noting that the increase in points over this four-year period is considerably higher than the modest increases in enrollments during this time period, the points per student—one measure of efficiency—has increased from .62 to .74 points per student.

In addition to this longitudinal look at the data, the college is also currently reporting on: Overall Performance; Points Increase by Category; Highest Achievement Points Earned by Students; Comparison to System by Intent & Enrollment Status; Points Earned by SVC Students Receiving State-Based Financial Support; and Points Earned by Basic Skills & I-BEST Students. Since it is also possible to disaggregate the data based on student intent and other characteristics, the database can serve as the source of data for some core indicators described later in this document.

Preface

Institutional Changes since the Last Report

The major change since the 2009 Accreditation Self-Study has been significantly increasing enrollments coupled with a 24% reduction in state funding to the college. At the same time, students have experienced increasing tuition of approximately 7% per year. Like other colleges, Skagit is challenged to provide more with less.

Since the last self-study, the new Science and Allied Health building – Angst Hall – was completed and earned a LEEDS Platinum designation. The Northwest Career and Technical Academy (NCTA) on the Mount Vernon campus and a Marine Technology Center in Anacortes were completed, making new professional-technical programs available to high school and college students, using industry standards-based curriculum and certifications.

The college was recently informed that it has been selected to become an Achieving the Dream (ATD) college. The ATD grant will assist the college with its increasing emphasis on student progress and completion and ongoing efforts to build a culture of evidence. This grant award also comes at a fortuitous time as we begin the new accreditation process since ATD is focused on systematic institutional improvement based on the use and analysis of institutional data.

Response to Recommendations

General Recommendation 1. The Evaluation Team recommends that the College demonstrate, through regular and systematic assessment, that students achieve the Learning Outcomes as defined within the General Education Learning Values. Although the College has provided evidence that Learning Outcomes are assessed in a variety of courses throughout the institution, it is unclear the extent to which individual students achieve a sufficient number of learning outcomes through their course requirements and electives.

In response to this recommendation, the Office of Institutional Research has conducted regular analyses of the courses completed by graduates of a variety of instructional programs to assess the degree to which graduates achieved general education learning outcomes in their coursework. This analysis is possible because SVC official course outlines include both content and general education outcomes.

An initial analysis with a small sample was conducted for the 2007-08 graduates immediately following the accreditation visit to establish methodology. The 2009 analysis included a sample of 137 of the 481 associate degree spring graduates. The 2010 graduate analysis included a sample of 96 of the 514 students who earned an associate degree in spring 2010. The District General Education Committee has reviewed the data and determined that most of the Gen Ed Learning Values were substantially covered. The committee is in the process of examining two (of 11) learning values where it appears that students might not get significant opportunities to achieve learning outcomes: 1) Aesthetics and Creativity, and 2) Global and Local Awareness and Responsibility. This effort will include an analysis by degree program.

General Recommendation 2. The Evaluation Team recommends that the College continues its efforts to increase consistency in the implementation of the outcomes assessment process and increase the understanding of faculty and appropriate staff about the assessment needed to continually improve student learning, based on assessment results.

In response to this recommendation, the college embarked on a campaign to update Learning Outcomes Assessment Plans (LOAPS) with renewed purpose and vigor. A two-hour session with faculty to assist them with work on their student learning outcomes assessment plans was held during the fall 2009 In-Service. Faculty reviewed local recommendations, if any, made in the evaluation report. Stipends have been made available to faculty for assessment projects related to their student learning outcomes assessment plans. Faculty in a number of departments—including English, Nursing, and Fine and Performing Arts—have taken advantage of the assessment project stipends to add depth and breadth to their outcomes assessment plans and to conduct comprehensive student learning outcomes assessment projects during the past two years.

A faculty member with a good background in assessment has been designated as an assessment liaison, providing faculty with consultation and support in updating and refining their LOAPS. She has done an outstanding job with encouraging and assisting faculty to conduct more systematic and in-depth assessment of student learning outcomes. Relying on the notion that an assessment plan must be "in action," not "planning to plan," almost all programs have updated their LOAPS to reflect current assessment data and how those data were used for program improvement. The updated LOAPs have been reviewed and show a significant increase in data and analysis compared to the LOAPs prepared two years ago.

General Recommendation 3. The Evaluation Team recommends that the College regularly and systematically evaluate all faculty at least every five years. In particular, evidence indicates the need to increase consistency in the evaluation of part-time faculty.

In response to this recommendation, the post-tenure evaluation process for full-time instructors has been revised to be more comprehensive. The new process includes creating a professional development plan, student feedback via the college's student opinionnaire, classroom/online course observations, and a summary review by the immediate supervisor. Faculty members may also choose to utilize and include peer evaluations or a self assessment based on Small Group Instructional Diagnosis, videotape observations, portfolios, or other techniques.

The college has implemented an annual evaluation for all adjunct faculty which includes both an observation and student feedback. The college also instituted a more systematic evaluation of full-time faculty, on a five-year cycle, which includes class observations and student feedback. We are looking at the possibility of a third component for the full-time evaluation process.

In addition, the use of multiple class/instructor observation forms has been replaced with a revised, single class/instructor observation form that more appropriately reflects effective teaching and student engagement strategies.

Review of Mission and Core Themes

The review of college mission and goals is part of the college's institutional improvement cycle. The mission, vision, and goals of the college underwent a major revision in 2005, led by a Steering Committee under the active leadership of the then-new president and with the assistance of an outside consultant. The revised mission and goals were incorporated into the Board of Trustees' policies. The college puts these policies into action through a comprehensive strategic plan that clearly focuses on access and success for less advantaged students in support of Board policies. Progress in achieving strategic goals and Board Ends Policies is tracked and reported in several ways, including Mid-Year and Year-End Reports to the Board of Trustees. The Board is also provided periodic Monitoring Reports.

Relationships are at the center of and the key to Skagit Valley College's national recognition for excellence in student learning, engagement, and success (Carey 2007, 2010; CCSSE 2003, 2007). Similarly, the institutional culture at Skagit is characterized by collegiality and a strong emphasis on the value of relationships and community. The development of Core Themes and Objectives over the past year reflects this emphasis on community and collegiality.

Central to the success of developing widely-accepted core themes has been the diversity of the Standard One Committee membership. They brought multiple perspectives to the discussions and deliberations that characterized the development process. The Standard One Committee included the following members:

> George Biehl, Faculty, Science, WIC
> Joe Buenaventura, Staff, Information Technology, WIC
> Alan Muia, Dean of Student Services
> Maureen Pettitt, Director of Institutional Research
> Linda Smith, Faculty, Communication Studies, MVC
> Claus Svendsen, Faculty, Environmental Conservation, MVC
> Gary Tollefson, President
> Catherine Wessels, Staff, Assistant to the Vice-President for Instruction and Student Services

There were multiple opportunities for input from all college stakeholders, including the community. Discussions were held at a joint Board of Trustees/President's Cabinet retreat in August 2010 and during the fall 2010 in-service activities with the college community. The Standard One Committee encouraged comments at any time in the process and provided information on the college's portal web site.

Following a lively and thoughtful discussion, the Skagit Valley College Core Themes and Objectives were approved by the Board of Trustees at their February 22, 2011 meeting.

Chapter One: Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

Section I – College Mission

The College's mission statement is: "*Skagit Valley College exists to expand opportunities and horizons for students and to improve the communities in which they live. We achieve this by welcoming and valuing diverse learners, providing quality education and support, and contributing community leadership and service.*"

The mission of Skagit Valley College derives to some extent from the Community College Act of 1967 which requires that the state's community colleges offer 1) an open door to every citizen, regardless of his or her academic background or experience, at a cost normally within his or her economic means; and 2) a thoroughly comprehensive educational, training and service programs to meet the needs of both the communities and students served by combining high standards of excellence in academic transfer courses; realistic and practical courses in occupational education, both graded and ungraded; community services of an educational, cultural, and recreational nature; and adult education, including basic skills and general, family, and workforce literacy programs and services (RCW 28B.50.020). More importantly, however, the mission derives from the college's history of commitment to and innovations in creating connections, deepening understanding, and broadening horizons of its student, employees, and the community.

Interpretation of Fulfillment of the Institution's Mission

Skagit Valley College defines mission fulfillment as, first, meeting an acceptable level of performance on each of its core themes:
- Core Theme I: Fostering Quality Learning Opportunities and Outcomes
- Core Theme II: Building and Supporting Healthy Communities
- Core Theme III: Creating and Supporting Educational Alignment, Achievement and Transitions

In addition, the college will determine mission fulfillment by evaluating the degree to which the indicators described below are being met. Units in the college will develop action plans with objectives that align with the core theme objectives, thus creating a scaffold for mission fulfillment. The President's Cabinet and the Board of Trustees will review on a regular basis achievement toward core theme objectives. This ongoing review of core themes, objectives, indicators and thresholds will provide information to determine whether the core themes and objectives are appropriate and adequate for measuring mission fulfillment.

Articulation of an Acceptable Threshold or Extent of Mission Fulfillment

Desired outcomes have been established for each of the core theme objectives as presented on pages 9 – 14 of this report, and it is expected that the college would achieve 85% of these outcomes on a continual basis as a means of determining mission fulfillment.

Section II – Core Themes

Core Theme I: Fostering Quality Learning Opportunities and Outcomes

What it would look like: Institutional structure, programs, and services focused on creating access and quality educational programs and services that result in identifiable learning for students and employees.

Core Theme Objectives	Indicators
1. Educational access for a diverse community	1. Participation rate (17 – 64 year olds in the district who attend a community college) and student demographics
2. Quality, equitable student learning outcomes at both the general education and program level	2. Student learning and engagement outcomes as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), the Survey of Student's Experiences of Learning in Learning Communities, and other assessments of general education outcomes
3. Learning opportunities for faculty, staff and administrators	3. Attendance at/satisfaction with professional development opportunities

Desired Outcomes

1. The participation rate of 17 – 64 year olds in the district who attend a community college will be at least that of the system average.

2. Student enrollments substantially reflect the diversity of the district population of 17 – 64 year olds.

3. Skagit students will be more engaged with their learning, faculty, and peers than comparison colleges.

4. Skagit graduates will meet the general education learning outcomes identified in course outlines and the program-level Learning Outcomes Assessment Plans.

5. Students who are underrepresented will achieve similar educational outcomes with regard to engagement, progression, and completion as their counterparts who are not underrepresented.

Rationale

The college mission emphasizes quality learning opportunities for a diverse community. This institutional focus on learning and engagement has resulted in a range of strategies designed to engage students in learning and in the learning process, and to encourage interaction with the faculty and their peers. These strategies are integrated into the classroom, into the registration and advising process, and in extra- and co-curricular activities.

The college's CCSSE data indicates students who are first-generation and from low-income families are less likely than their peers to get support from their family and friends. Creating opportunities for them to make connections with faculty and peers may be critical to their retention and success. The data also suggest that the strategies we have been using in recent years are working. For example, our CCSSE data indicates that SVC students with multiple risk factors were significantly more likely to use peer or other tutoring, seek financial aid advising, and report that the college is a comfortable environment than students with no risk factors.

 We currently measure the degree to which college employees participate in professional development opportunities and how they plan to apply what they learn using an online survey based on a model that evaluates training outcomes at multiple levels (Alliger, et.al. 1997).

Core Theme II: Building and Supporting Healthy Communities

What it would look like: Institutional structure, programs, and services that create, communicate, and support a sense of community internally and externally, and contribute to the economic, environmental, and social vitality of the college's communities and partners.

Core Theme Objectives	Indicators
1. Relationships and connections that create engagement and success in our learning environments	1. Student learning and engagement outcomes as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and Survey of Student's Experiences of Learning in Learning Communities
2. Partnerships with the community that contribute to cultural and economic development	2. Employment profiles of leavers (DLOA); community and advisory committee surveys; sponsorship of community and cultural events
3. Facilities, systems, and programs that are regenerative and sustainable	3. Adherence to LEED standards and the principles of the Presidents' Climate Commitment

Desired Outcomes

1. Skagit students will be more engaged with their learning, faculty, and peers than comparison colleges based on results from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement.

2. Students enrolled in Skagit's learning communities will report levels of engagement and learning at least equal to other community colleges in the cohort using the Survey of Students' Experiences of Learning in Learning Communities.

3. Advisory Committee members will report on the Advisory Committee Survey that the quality of Skagit's workforce programs and students are above average.

4. Students obtaining degrees and certificates from Skagit's workforce programs will have overall employment placements at or above the system average.

5. The college will demonstrate active leadership for and participation in community and business endeavors through participation in partnerships, projects, service clubs, etc., and sponsorship of community and cultural events.

6. Decisions made at the college will reflect the desire to create and adopt ecologically sound, regenerative, and sustainable facilities, systems and program, using the Presidents' Climate Commitment as the evaluative framework.

Rationale

The college has a history of marshalling its curricular efforts to help learners engage in a variety of communities: their classroom community, their campus community, their work community, and a more global community. We do this because the research findings are clear: the more actively engaged students are—with faculty and staff, with other students, with the subject matter being learned—the more likely they are to persist in their college studies and to achieve at higher levels (e.g. Kuh, 2008; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). The table below compares Skagit's 2010 benchmark score with those of all other medium colleges in the cohort and shows a significantly higher score for active and collaborative learning than similar colleges in the country.

	Active & Collaborative Learning	Student Effort	Academic Challenge	Student-Faculty Interaction	Support for Learners
Skagit Valley College	55.7	53.2	53.9	53.6	48.4
All Medium Colleges	50.0	50.4	50.1	50.1	50.1

Building relationships with the community outside the college is a priority for Skagit Valley College. These relationships contribute significantly to the college's ability to respond quickly to community needs. We currently partner with the community through a myriad of projects and activities, for example, the partnership created with local school districts to establish the Northwest Career and Technical Academy (NCTA), bringing high school students to state-of-the-art facilities located at the college. Through its Head Start and ECEAP programs, the college partners with school districts and human services and public health agencies to support healthy families and early learning.

The college partners with businesses and the Economic Development Association of Skagit County through participation in the Skagit Envision 2060 futures project. The college was a co-founding member of Leadership Skagit, a program designed to develop leaders at all levels in our community. The college also participates and/or sponsors a range of community events including Adult Literacy Week, Artsphere, the Skagit River Poetry Festival, and a Sustainability Fair held on both campuses. One of the college's most successful events is GlobalFest, a two-week event with such nationally-recognized speakers as Greg Mortenson and Rick Steves.

Core Theme III: Creating and Supporting Educational Alignment, Achievement and Transitions

What it would look like: Institutional structure, programs, and services that are aligned, understandable, consistent, and adaptable in ways that foster successful transitions across levels of educational attainment, and into the workforce.

Core Theme Objectives	Indicators
1. Curricula and support services that are aligned to produce maximum institutional coherence	1. Curricula and support services that are aligned to produce maximum institutional coherence
2. Student progression and completions	2. Student achievement points regarding progression and completions
3. Student success in transitioning to four-year programs/institutions and/or to the workforce	3. Student success in transitioning to four-year programs/institutions and/or to the workforce

Desired Outcomes

1. The college will establish a vision and model for the alignment and coherence of curricular and support services and methods for measuring achievement toward the ideals described in the vision and model.

2. The college will maintain or increase Student Achievement points-per-student for specified categories of students based on mission area and/or student characteristics, especially successful completion of developmental coursework.

3. Students obtaining degrees and certificates from Skagit's workforce programs will have overall employment placements at or above the system average.

4. Students obtaining transfer degrees from Skagit Valley College will have GPAs at their transfer institution equal or greater than their counterparts from other community colleges.

Rationale

The objective of coherence and alignment of functions—curriculum and student services—is a crucial one for the college, especially in light of the national completion agenda and the college's upcoming participation in Achieving the Dream. The notion of functional alignment was recently discussed in a brief prepared by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University (Jenkins 2011). The author notes that "studies of effective undergraduate institutions emphasize the importance of coordinating instruction and student support services" (p. 1) and suggests that community colleges "should review and align their practices and policies to improve student learning and progression toward degrees and close achievement gaps among

student groups" (p. 5). This core theme provides a catalyst for Skagit Valley College to begin engaging in that review and alignment. This core theme also supports current and emerging partnerships with local school districts (i.e., Tech Prep, NCTA, Anacortes School District mathematics project) and other community colleges in the state to encourage alignment and coherence across educational boundaries.

The college mission states that we want to expand the horizons of our students. A crucial step in expanding horizons is giving students what they need to transition to the next phase of their educational journey. As noted in the "Institutional Context" section of this document, the college is engaged in creating and initiating strategies aimed at improving student success (i.e., AVID, Counseling-Enhanced Developmental Learning Communities, linked College Success Skills courses), especially for new and/or underprepared students. Our Student Achievement data tell us that students participating in state-funded targeted programs, such as Opportunity Grants and I-BEST, are more likely to make momentum points than their counterparts not engaged in these programs. We expect that the Achieving the Dream (ATD) grant award will result in additional student success initiatives at the college over the next few years, since the focus of ATD is to improve success among community-college students, particularly low-income students and students of color.

As noted previously, the state's fully implemented Student Achievement Initiative system identifies "momentum points" – measures designed to focus on short-term, intermediate outcomes that provide meaningful momentum towards degree and certificate completion for all students regardless of demographic characteristics, where they start, or their educational background and goals. The Student Achievement database provided by the state allows colleges to disaggregate the data using student intent and other characteristics. Until this year, however, there has been no easy way to track cohorts based on their involvement with one or more of the initiatives noted above. The change to the database will allow the college to more easily track student achievement points based on their participation in various student success and completion initiatives.

In addition, the college defines success for students not only as transitioning from basic skills to developmental coursework to college-level coursework, but also the transition to the workforce and transfer to four-year institutions after they leave Skagit. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges has a relatively robust system for tracking workforce outcomes and a system for tracking transfer students is in progress. Both systems will allow us to measure desired outcomes under this core theme.

Chapter Summary

The college's mission, vision and value statements, revised in 2006-07, reflect the college's 85-year history as an integral part of the communities it serves. Indeed, the college is sometimes challenged by the collective ambition of faculty, administrators and staff to undertake new and innovative projects to meet the needs of its varied communities and enhance the success of its students. The results for the College and its stakeholders, however, have made these efforts worthwhile.

The core themes and objectives described in Section II reflect not only the college mission statement— *to expand opportunities and horizons for students and to improve the communities in which they live—*but also address the desire of the institution to make the changes necessary to help students meet their educational goals. According to the Center for American Progress (2008), America's educational system has a readiness problem: "Students are not ready for college, colleges are not ready for students, and public policy, long focused on making college more affordable, is not yet ready to take on the complex challenge of ensuring people successfully complete college degrees and transition into rewarding careers, as opposed to just getting in." They recommend that higher education address the problem by 1) building capacity to help institutions change practices and develop new approaches to improving student success in college, 2) creating more seamless alignment across secondary and postsecondary education and with other systems, and 3) enhancing accountability by measuring learning and success in schools and colleges.

The college anticipates that the focus on the mission and core themes and objectives described above will respond to these recommendations by focusing on some fundamental, systemic changes in how we operate, improving our processes to help students learn to navigate, both physically and in terms of bureaucratic requirements, meet new expectations, and engage in new types of interpersonal relationships so they can be successful. The college mission also points to a focus on student learning, engagement, completions, and transitions. The partnerships we currently have and will develop in the future with community, business, and educational entities are critical to designing effective programs and processes.

The college will rely heavily on measures that draw from surveys regularly conducted to allow comparisons with other colleges, including the Community College Survey of Student Engagement and the Survey of Student's Experiences of Learning in Learning Communities, and other assessments of general education outcomes. State databases regarding student achievement, workforce outcomes, and transfer outcomes will provide comparable measures. While survey and student data provide a good starting point, when appropriate the college will also conduct follow-up studies to examine issues in depth, enabling the college to better understand the data.

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