



**Progress Report**

**to the**

**Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities**

**to Address Recommendation #1**

**from the**

**Fall 2007 Regular Interim Evaluation Report**

**by**

**Shoreline Community College**  
**16101 Greenwood Avenue North**  
**Shoreline, WA 98133**

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**PROGRESS REPORT  
TO NORTHWEST COMMISSION ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES  
OCTOBER 16, 2009**

**Introduction**

Pursuant to the terms of the January 31, 2008 letter from Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), and subsequent reminder letter, March 13, 2009, requesting that Shoreline Community College prepare a progress report to address Recommendation One of the Fall 2007 Regular Interim Evaluation Report, this narrative describes the College's progress through the beginning of the current fiscal year. The recommendation states:

*While the evaluators found that the institution has made excellent progress in the realm of planning and budgeting, and has initiated processes to influence budgeting, it still needs to demonstrate that systematic planning influences College-wide budget allocation. The evaluators recommend that the institution use the results of its systematic evaluation activities and ongoing planning processes to influence resource allocation and to improve its instructional programs, institutional services, and activities. (Standard 1.B.4).*

The College has taken this recommendation seriously and has integrated systematic evaluation activities for its decisions regarding resource allocations and reductions. Since 2006, when the College was first rebased per requirements of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Board of Trustees, the leadership, faculty and staff of Shoreline Community College have all participated in open, collaborative, yet difficult, budget cutting processes to keep the College strong enough to serve upwards of 10,000 students, who come to our institution for their "educational, workforce and cultural needs."

Shoreline Community College continues to be steadfast in its commitment to systematic planning and budgeting. Despite extraordinarily challenging economic times, the College has made – and continues to make – excellent progress in aligning in systematic ways its strategic planning, evaluation activities and budgeting functions to improve instructional programs, institutional services and college activities. These systematic changes have led to a successful, if not painful, reduction of 34 staff positions, and an institution poised and ready to make further cuts as the economic situation warrants. During these difficult times, when the State Board system has significantly reduced colleges' budgets, Shoreline's systematic evaluation and planning processes have kept the College stable. Enrollments are currently up about 6% in spite of program reductions. While eliminating ineffective and inefficient programs to meet State Board and fiscal demands, the College's systematic evaluation processes have allowed us to allocate scarce resources throughout the institution to improve viable programs and services.

## **Planning and Resource Allocation: Progress and Growth 2008-2009**

The major changes in leadership that marked the beginning of President Lee Lambert's term continued into and through 2008. Successful searches resulted in the hiring of three new vice presidents in July 2008, each with substantial administrative, public sector, and higher education experience that would prove vital to ongoing systematic planning and evaluation efforts, especially since the upcoming budget crisis would require experienced leadership to guide faculty, staff and students through a period of unprecedented economic uncertainty. Firmly entrenched within the fabric of the College, the College's strategic planning document guided the budget planning process through the entire 2008-2009 academic year. Its core values and themes have directed the planning work of the College's Budget Committee, faculty and classified staff unions, College Council, Student Parliament, as well as the entire faculty and staff.

The College's governance process is strong and certain. Key committees, made up of representatives from all constituencies of the College, provide significant contributions in the form of recommendations to the leadership team. Both the Budget Committee and Strategic Planning Committee have been especially vital to the College's planning and evaluation efforts over the past several years. The Budget Committee, in particular, played a central role in developing and overseeing the budget planning process throughout 2008-2009.

### **Strategic Planning in 2008-2009**

As stated in the College's 2007 report to NWCCU, the College solicited ideas for focused strategic priorities from all constituencies. Ultimately, the College selected, and the Board of Trustees approved, two areas for strategic and budget focus: 1) Technology; and 2) Student Success. While it was expected that budget priority would be afforded these two focus areas, the unanticipated fiscal crisis in 2008 required that the College review all programs in the context of the mission, and do so via a "zero-based" approach. At a time when Shoreline Community College needed to direct resources to these two important strategic priorities, in particular, the State of Washington's fiscal crisis necessitated that the College circumvent its original objective. Early in the year, the State urged colleges to hold the line on equipment and salary spending and then later mandated it in the form of a "spending freeze" on these items. As a consequence, neither area was afforded the kind of priority and focus in the 2008-2009 or 2009-2010 operating budgets.

### **Strategic Planning Online- SPOL**

As planned in our 2007 report, the College continues its transition from using the Goals and Assessment Matrix as its primary program planning and analysis component of the strategic planning process to its more comprehensive tool-- Strategic Planning Online (SPOL) software. SPOL allows each operational unit of the College to coordinate its operational strategies and align them with: 1) the Strategic Plan; 2) the operating budget; and 3) NWCCU standards of accreditation. In addition, SPOL incorporates benchmarks and key data indicators to measure area progress toward achievement of its strategic goals and objectives.

Every program and unit was asked to use SPOL for its planning processes, and training began 2008-2009 during the onset of the ongoing statewide budget crisis. The Strategic Planning Committee organized college-wide training for administration and staff on the use of the College's integrated strategic planning tool, and completed the first round of training during 2008-2009; training of additional directors is slated to occur this year. While it was intended that SPOL would be fully implemented by the start of the 2009 fall quarter, the critical nature of the state's and the College's fiscal circumstances caused a delay. Work in SPOL was suspended to some degree because major reductions to units, programs and budgets had to be made. Yet another factor related to postponing full implementation of SPOL is that the NWCCU accreditation standards changed. The College is primed and ready to modify SPOL as soon as the Commission on Colleges formally adopts the new standards. SPOL can then be updated, and once training is completed, the former Goals and Assessment matrix will be eliminated. Until then, however, the two processes continue to run in parallel.

As this transition continues, all units of the College are still required to develop work plans using either the Goals and Assessment matrix or SPOL. Without a doubt, the Strategic Plan has been successfully assimilated into all areas of the College. It is now universally recognized by Administrators, Deans, Directors, and front line staff and faculty as articulating the core themes and mission of the College. Particularly during this past year, when significant budget reductions were implemented, all constituencies relied on the Strategic Plan to make critical resource allocation decisions and to make the case for pursuing one strategic priority over another. For example, decisions regarding staff reorganization in the Student Success division were guided by the directive of the Strategic Plan to provide "convenient, student-friendly enrollment services." In addition, financial allocations to Technology, though less than originally anticipated due to budget cut requirements, want to equip some renovated classrooms with updated technology infrastructure.

## **Master Plan**

Planning activities now consider not only operating concerns, but also capital and major projects. Throughout 2008 and into 2009 the College, under the leadership of the Vice President of Administrative Services and Director of Facilities, and including all constituencies of the College who provided input, has undertaken a master planning process which has set the course for the campus for the next 30-35 years. This Master Plan has now become a viable long-range evaluation plan for campus facilities, which meets two of our objectives in our Strategic Plan—Implementing "a unified plan for the maintenance and improvement of classrooms, buildings and campus groups" for our Infrastructure and Technology goal, and operating "the College in an environmentally responsible way," under the strategic goal of Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability.

## **Systematic Planning and Resource Allocation Under Crisis Conditions: 2008-2009**

Although the state's substantial budget woes contributed to a delay in implementation of the College's new strategic planning tool, the College continued to progress in its ability to integrate strategic planning and resource allocation. The strength and consistency of Shoreline Community College's planning, evaluation and allocation processes were demonstrated through the manner in which required budget cuts were made. Building on work that had been done

before and since 2007, the leadership team intensified its effort to engage the community in a systematic, data-driven planning and allocation process. Though different in appearance and intent from the College's original direction prior to the state budget crisis, it was nonetheless highly effective, and has established a planning process standard moving forward.

In 2008-2009, the College's Budget Committee, Strategic Plan, Master Plan, and Program Reviews helped define the processes by which the College planned its resource allocation for the 2009-2010 fiscal year. Program Reviews, in particular, were conducted using in-depth, data-driven evaluation tools, which contributed substantially to strategic budget decisions. The Budget Committee also developed criteria – which it called “Points of Consideration” – through which it directed the administration to allocate resources, among other things, in accordance with the existing Strategic Plan.

While the uncertain nature of the state's developing financial crisis occupied the majority of the administration's time, it also facilitated a more analytical, strategy-based integrated approach to resource allocation. The College's leadership adopted this approach, not only in its resource allocation planning for the 2009-2010 academic year, but also in making necessary, mandated budget adjustments in 2008-2009. The scope of the budget reductions (more than 12% of the College's operating allocation, ultimately) were substantial enough to warrant redirecting the energy and resources of the leadership team for most of the 2008-2009 academic year. The uncertainty about how much the College would ultimately have to cut from its budget created an extraordinary planning challenge. How would the College continue to meet the terms of its strategic plan and its mission, when it was unsure of how much would actually be cut? The key challenge was to ensure that mission-critical activities could continue in a number of different budget scenarios, encompassing reductions anywhere within the range of 5% to 20%. That the College had made substantial progress aligning its planning and allocation functions proved instrumental in successfully navigating the financial challenges, and in developing an operational plan that encompassed the central themes of Shoreline Community College's Strategic Plan.

### **Communication to the Campus**

Throughout his tenure, President Lambert has espoused the virtue of clear, transparent communication. At a time when uncertainty and anxiety are high, such open and honest dialogue has been extremely well received on the campus. By utilizing multiple communication vehicles, including all-campus meetings, the College's “Day at a Glance” postings on the institution's intranet, and committee and council meetings, the President and Senior Executive team were able to create a high degree of cooperation with the planning tasks at hand. Regular, ongoing communications provided all members of the campus community the opportunity to participate in strategic planning and budget meetings. Minutes of all committee meetings were posted on the College's intranet, and the President and senior leadership team met on several different occasions with the Budget Committee to discuss progress on plan development through the year.

The primary objective of the College's strategic and resource planning process in 2008 (for the present 2009-2010 academic year) was to develop three strategic budget reduction scenarios: 10%, 15% and 20%. The College determined its strategic assumptions as follows:

- No change in the FTE target

- Protect the core missions of instruction: transfer, professional-technical, developmental and non-credit programs
- Focus on College as a whole versus individual divisions

### **Budget Committee Criteria**

The senior executive team utilized the input of all staff and faculty, by means of anonymous comments solicited and submitted via the College website, and multiple drop boxes, through division/department meetings, and through individual solicitations. Data definitions and program review criteria were established and approved, and the executive team's guiding principles could be found within the text of the budget committee's "Points of Consideration:"

1. Apply Standards of Accreditation when determining core services essential to the mission of a comprehensive community college. (Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, 2003 Edition)

<http://www.nwccu.org/Standards%20and%20Policies/Guide%20for%20Self-Study/Standards%20and%20Guide.htm>.

- a. Institutional Mission and Goals, Planning and Effectiveness
- b. Educational Program and Its Effectiveness
- c. Students
- d. Faculty
- e. Library and Information Resources
- f. Governance and Administration
- g. Finance
- h. Physical Resources
- i. Institutional Integrity

2 Recognizing the substantial nature of the current budget reduction requirement, and in consideration of the impact of said reduction on the College's future strategic direction, the strategic themes as articulated in the College's current strategic plan will be used as principles to guide the budget reduction process.

3 Meet fiduciary (i.e., financial, contractual, legal and regulatory) obligations.

4 All programs/services, defined as organizational units at the College that provide academic, student, public or any other services, and all aspects of the current operation, are reviewed for possible reduction. In general, the process will:

- Emphasize the principle of efficiency, whereby the total cost (considered in terms of economics, educational, social, human, community, etc.) associated with a retained program does not exceed total benefit.
- Emphasize current and future cost-effectiveness, defined as the 'relative cost of offering a program/service measured against the relative outcomes (i.e., impacts)' of a program/service.

- Consider the positive impact that a program/service has on meeting state mandated student achievement initiative targets  
[http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e\\_studentachievement.aspx](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_studentachievement.aspx)
- Be balanced in a way so as to meet the mission of the College

5 Make every effort to maintain basic service levels, while reducing the cost of providing those services. Consider reduction measures that will have the least impact on overall college operations, and contemplate the use of alternate entities, via contracts or partnerships, for example, that are consistent with labor contract requirements, to meet critical needs.

6 Every effort will be made to strive for position placements that, in any college reorganization, assigns responsibilities according to established knowledge, skills and ability of qualified individuals, in deference to fiduciary obligations as described in #3.

7 Treat people with respect and dignity; make every effort to minimize impact on people's lives (e.g. early notification from the president, confidentiality, focus on positions rather than performance or persons, and data-driven decisions).

8 Maximize revenue and operating efficiency of all revenue-generating programs.

9 Make every effort to continue meeting the needs of the external work force, and consider the economic needs of the community in doing so.

Using all of the above, plus program reviews, contents of area strategic work plans, and information contained in SPOL and Goals and Assessment Matrices, the leadership team constructed a focused, intensive and collaborative planning process, which resulted in three different possible scenarios by which the College would construct its 2009-2010 budget.

In each division (Academic Affairs, Student Success, Administrative Services, and Human Resources) the respective Vice-President led division Deans and area Directors through Program Review processes comprised of multiple, division-centered analysis and review meetings, through which objective indicators were obtained and assessed. The senior leadership team regularly came together to integrate their work, assess overall impact of various strategic and financial scenarios on the College, and align the strategic approaches with the Strategic Plan – the core themes and mission of the College. Two of these areas are described in detail below:

### **Program Reviews – Instruction**

On the academic side, division Deans utilized data-driven analysis and evaluation processes in the form of program reviews (a process and criteria which they had actually developed collaboratively) for every academic program in the College. Program Reviews, incorporated the following indicators into the formal review process:

- FTE trends (enrollment)
- Annual and/or Quarterly Target attainment (enrollment)
- Student: Faculty ratios
- Course fill rates (enrollment)

- Cost per FTE
- Program Completion Trends
- Program Operation Costs
- Post-graduate transfer rates/performance
- Faculty load history and FTE generation (enrollment)

Addition criteria were developed and applied to professional technical programs:

- Program Completion Trends (enrollment)
- Labor Market demand/program currency
- Post-graduate employment
- Program Operating Costs

Deans conducted thorough analyses of each of their programs and utilized performance measures and the College's Strategic Plan in their final recommendations. With the state's continuing budget shortfalls, these criteria and the Program Review process had developed into a comprehensive, effective and reasonable procedure by which program reductions and eliminations could be determined. The campus thus far has been disappointed by the loss of particular staff and faculty, but this process assured them and the administration that programs had been treated fairly and consistently.

The Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Deans emphasized enrollment as a key factor in the criteria for Program Reviews. Deans conducted more detailed analysis based on program by program enrollment, as well as anomalies that are known to occur. By incorporating a variety of above performance indicators, and in consideration of unique attributes of each academic program, each area Dean was able to determine a reasonable enrollment target for each academic program, and in doing so created benchmarks against which strategic budget reduction decisions would be measured.

Once appropriate enrollment targets were created, programs were evaluated against one another to determine which would be considered "low." Programs were categorized in three ways: 1) lowest enrolled programs would be put "on notice;" 2) programs that had higher enrollment than low programs, but were not meeting targets would need to meet their targets quickly; and 3) programs with sufficient enrollment to meet targets, and/or those that were advancing quickly, were not in danger of being reduced. Each Dean maintained a separate record of all pertinent data used during the evaluation process.

Over a period of months, the Deans met with program faculty and staff for input to review the criteria and for their recommendations for budget cuts. The Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Deans met many times to discuss and pare down the data; the team then constructed three budget scenarios at cut rates of 10%, 15% and 20%, respectively. The strategic decisions considered in each division were carefully analyzed against the criteria, until a final recommendation was determined.

### **Program Reviews – Student Success**

Similarly, the student services division (now called Student Success) focused on the College's Strategic Plan, individual strategic work plans of each Director within student success,

the Budget Committee's Points of Consideration, as well as other criteria specific to this area of the College. The Vice President for Student Success and her division Directors identified guiding principles including: focusing on student learning and student success; flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness; and innovation, all elements of the College's strategic planning document.

Units within Student Success were reviewed and evaluated by looking primarily at the capacity in each area to meet student needs. This was a particularly important point of emphasis. Prior to mandated budget reductions, the College had previously identified Student Success as a "strategic focus area" and intended to allocate additional resources to the division with the objective of providing more and better services directly to students. Despite the emergent fiscal crisis, the systematic strategic planning and resource allocation process did indeed further the Strategic Plan by funding the Student Achievement Initiative, and by reallocating some funds from other areas of the College to help support the two previously chosen focus areas: technology infrastructure and student success.

Data evaluated and analyzed in determining student success strategic decisions included:

- Student / Staff FTE ratios vs. "Like" colleges
- Student / Staff FTE ratios vs. WA CTC System
- 5-Year Trends in Advising and Counseling Services to Students
- Financial Aid, Workforce, Scholarships and Agency Funding
- Admissions Reports, by:
  - Age of Student
  - Gender
  - Race/Ethnicity
  - Degree Objectives
  - Resident status
  - Citizenship

## **Conclusion**

The state's financial circumstances over the past 15 months have had a substantial negative impact on community and technical colleges, as it has on virtually all state agencies. The magnitude of the reductions forced the College to divert from its current path of aligning its strategic planning and resource allocation processes. Because of the abrupt nature of this shift in strategic direction, caused by the state's multiple financial directives and mandates, it is somewhat challenging to measure the true progress of the College against the NWCCU's 2007 expectations. Nevertheless, as the most recent strategic and resource allocation processes demonstrate, Shoreline Community College has taken significant steps towards systematic alignment of its strategic planning and resource allocation processes through its Strategic Plan, SPOL, Program Review, Master Plan, and Budget Committee processes.

While the College's leaders are pleased with this progress, they are not satisfied; there is more work to be done. Efforts to finally integrate the Budget and Strategic Planning Committees will continue; achieving this by the start of the next academic year is essential. To this end, a task force will be created this year, comprised of members from each committee, to integrate the

work and agendas of each committee and develop a common agenda, which will drive decision-making in 2010. Additionally, the College will continue to enhance its ability to collect vital, relevant data with which a standardized process of program and services review can be enhanced and implemented. Moving all of the College's administrators successfully through the Strategic Planning Online software training, and ensuring that this highly effective tool is used universally throughout the College, will provide a reliable, efficient method of measuring annual performance against Strategic Plan goals.

The revised accreditation standards, and new accreditation process provide Shoreline Community College with an additional opportunity to develop key indicators and benchmarks against which performance will be measured. The emphasis on objective standards to measure progress will only enhance the alignment of strategic planning and resource allocation "on the ground."

Over the past four years, the College has actively implemented strategic directions delineated in the Strategic Plan, criteria and processes developed by the Budget Committee, an online budget and planning tool-SPOL, regular Program Reviews in all academic areas, as well as in other non-instructional units, and developed a long-range Master Plan. These ambitious planning and resource allocation activities in which the Board of Trustees, the President, senior leadership team, and all members of the College's community have engaged for the past two years should confirm that Shoreline Community College has made, and continues to make, very substantial strides in its endeavor to meet accreditation standards long recommended by the Commission.