

ADVANCEMENT SECTION

REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT

TO

**Casper College
Casper, WY 82601**

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FOR

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

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ADVANCEMENT SECTION

I. OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

Founded in 1945, Casper College is the oldest community college in Wyoming. Since that time, it has grown to 28 buildings covering more than 200 acres at the foot of Casper Mountain.

One of seven community colleges in the state, its service area includes all of Natrona County in central Wyoming. While the population of the city of Casper is just over 50,000, the population of Natrona County exceeds 70,000 people. Casper College students come to Casper from within the service area, the entire state of Wyoming, 37 other states, and 15 foreign countries. In the fall of 2007, there were 4,356 students enrolled in credit classes at Casper College (approximately 3,396 FTE) and an additional 686 were students enrolled in noncredit classes. Over 400 students live in housing on campus.

Currently, Casper College offers 103 associate degrees and 31 one-year certificate programs in eight academic divisions: Business, Fine Arts, Health Sciences, Language & Literature, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Social & Behavioral Sciences and Trades & Technology. Through Continuing Education even more students are served through non-credit programs. Additionally, through partnerships with 15 other institutions, 21 bachelor's degree programs, nine master's degree programs, and four doctoral degree programs are offered via Casper College.

With approximately 170 full-time and 120 part-time faculty members, the college boasts a 16:1 student-to-faculty ratio.

The visiting team identified a number of strengths at Casper College. These include, but are not limited to:

Criterion One – Mission and Integrity

1. The Casper College Board of Trustees is well-informed and committed to the success of the college.

Criterion Two – Preparing for the Future

2. The organization's planning documents demonstrate that attention is being paid to emerging factors such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.

3. The Department of International Education helps to foster an institutional climate that supports international education and cross-cultural awareness in order to prepare Casper College students for a global environment.
4. The Casper College Foundation has been exceptionally successful in raising private funds to support college projects.
5. In the past year, the college has increased its fund balance from 3% to the maximum 8% allowed by Wyoming law. This positions the institution to better respond to possible state budget reductions.
6. The college's master plan includes an aggressive facilities construction program to better serve the Casper community.

Criterion Three – Student Learning and Effective Teaching

7. Casper College has implemented several new student development programs, including learning communities, service learning, the Veritas Honors Institute, and international education. All of these initiatives are admirable attempts to support and enrich student learning.
8. One of the new initiatives of the Student Success Office is the McMurry Single Parent Grant-in-Aid program. Over the past two years, the McMurry program has provided more than \$123,000 to 92 single parents for tuition, books, supplies, and childcare.
9. Casper College provides many resources to support student learning. These include remedial coursework, a Writing Center, an English Lab, a Peer Tutoring Program and a Mathematics Learning Center.
10. In 2008, Casper College launched a First Year Experience program in an attempt to increase student success and persistence.
11. Because the college enjoys unusually strong financial support from its community, its physical resources are in many ways remarkable for an institution of its size.
12. The faculty at Casper College are well qualified to determine curricular content and strategies for instruction. They also have a passion for their roles in promoting student learning and success.
13. The Casper College campus is located in a beautiful natural setting. The facilities and grounds are also immaculately maintained, which helps to create an environment conducive to learning.
14. The library has excellent resources and is well-staffed.

15. Within student services, an integrated counseling, retention, and accommodative services program has been forged to promote enhanced retention and student success.

Criterion Four – Acquisition, Discovery and Application of Knowledge

16. The organization supports professional development opportunities and makes them available to all of its administrators, faculty, and staff. In 2004, for example, the College President initiated a “Leadership Institute” with the intent of developing leadership skills among current employees.
17. Casper College has a tuition reimbursement policy for all employees.
18. The organization encourages curricular and cocurricular activities that promote opportunities for inquiry, creativity, and social responsibility.

Criterion Five – Engagement and Service

19. Casper College has a very impressive service learning program.
20. In responding to external constituencies, the organization offers programs such as continuing education, outreach, and customized training. Examples include the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, the Literacy Volunteers of Casper, and the Center for Training and Development.
21. The ACE program offered by the Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) allows high school students to earn up to nine credits per semester with tuition paid through a special tax levy.
22. The College has one of the highest “participation rates” in the nation. About 6.5% of adults in the service area take classes for credit, compared with a national average of about 4%.
23. Further evidence that the community values Casper College can be found in the fact that the citizens of Natrona County voted to increase their property taxes to approve a \$35 million dollar bond for new buildings at Casper College. Thanks to strong community support, the Casper College Foundation is also very healthy and continues to grow.
24. The University of Wyoming/Casper College (UW/CC) Center offers a variety of courses and degree programs right in Casper to meet the academic needs of students in central Wyoming.

These and many other strengths should serve the college and its stakeholders well as the institution rises to meet the challenges of the future.

II. CONSULTATIONS OF THE TEAM

A. Shared Governance and Decision-Making

Casper College embraces a philosophy of shared governance and participatory decision-making that is widely acclaimed by various constituent groups across the campus. The enthusiasm exhibited for this governance structure is both exciting and laudatory. Casper College's collegial model proposes that faculty and staff join in a decision-making process involving representatives of all constituencies who are empowered to formulate recommendations on planning, operations, and policy formulation. Additionally, the College has organized Program Advisory Boards for advice and counsel in the advancement of educational programs.

The team fully supports a shared governance model that is both collegial and collaborative in nature, recognizing the contributions and requirements of all members of the institution in a group consensus process that values the collective intelligence of the whole. This process fosters a sense of empowerment, equal partnership and a very strong interest in successful outcomes of institutional policy and implementation decisions. Additionally, shared governance can help strengthen planning strategies that link strategic initiatives and budgets while increasing institutional efficiency and effectiveness. Together these initiatives form a nucleus of a "learning institution" that thrives.

It is clear that the public was informed, engaged, and connected to the institution as a result of the successful capital referendum that resulted with a 58 percent approval. The team recommends that Casper College continue with fostering an environment that involves the community in the strategic planning processes through the development of a formal structure involving representatives from the community. Also, as a vehicle for sustaining community involvement, the College might consider an overall citizens President's Advisory Council that will meet once or twice a year..

Institutional planning models are enhanced as well with the inclusion of students participating as regular members on various standing committees/teams. The team encourages Casper College to continue with the recruiting of student representatives to participate as regular members on task forces and committees for which their input and perspectives will be of value.

B. Exemplary Facilities and Grounds

The Casper College facilities and setting has created a positive learning environment through the development of its site, the construction of its buildings, and the care that it has taken to maintain the physical environment for its faculty, staff and students. Taking advantage of the stark beauty of the area hills for the placement of the campus was a wonderful vision of the early governing board of the institution. The buildings constructed in the early phases of campus development are aesthetically pleasing and the newer buildings were excellently constructed and equipped. Likewise, the grounds are

immaculate. It is obvious to the team that the campus is a source of pride to all. With the completion of the approximately \$100 million capital development plan, the institution will be enhancing an already beautiful and well-functioning campus. It is clear the Physical Plant staff take a great deal of pride in maintaining the beauty of the campus, functionality of the facilities, and the cleanliness of the buildings. This pride and passion in the job by the Physical Plant staff permeates the environment. The institution has a comprehensive preventative-maintenance plan that is functional and kept current. Additionally, the Physical Plant operations has in place an energy-management system that controls the temperatures of each campus building. These well-managed facilities and grounds are conducive to learning. The excellent and well-maintained facilities and grounds makes for an effective work environment along with an excellent environment for student learning to occur. Given the various sources of funding for the Plant operations, the institution is in a solid financial position to sustain the high level of maintenance and care of facilities. Continued support of the maintenance and care of the facilities and grounds will sustain this excellent and productive environment.

C. Professional Growth and Development

The team was extremely pleased to see a priority and support for the growth and development opportunities available for the faculty and staff – in particular, the established Innovation Fund of \$100K created by the President to encourage creativity and innovation by the faculty and staff. The institution has many avenues available for faculty and staff to seek training and educational opportunities. As a team suggestion, the College might consider developing an on-going schedule of workshops and seminars conducted throughout the year at times and days that would be most convenient for the College and the employees. These could be short term sessions of perhaps 2-4 hours offered at repeating times so as to be available to all those wishing such training. The topics could be those general areas where a wide need would exist for the subject matter – e.g., emergency response training, customer service, assessment and institutional effectiveness, Datatel systems, safety, planning model, facilitator training, governance system, consensus decision-making principles, institutional fact-book, fund raising model, etc. A certificate might be developed on the completion of a certain number of hours within the program. This model would be in addition to the scheduled semester structured workshops and in-service days for faculty and staff.

D. College-Wide Planning Model

Although Casper College has a planning process in place and has linked planning and budgeting, the team thinks that improvements can be made to benefit the institution. A comprehensive model for the strategic and all institutional-wide plans would include a public participatory element, representation of the faculty, staff, students, and of course the Board of Trustees. It is important to have a comprehensive and open process of providing reliable information about the future needs and facts pertaining to the operations of the institution. An open system in the planning process will develop confidence in the college operations, an understanding of the link between facilities/technology and student learning, knowledge of the shifting enrollments or

demographics, and ownership in the institution by others because they are involved in finding solutions.

Typically, the process starts with the development of a shared vision, which Casper College has done. Strategic planning is a process by which the guiding members of the institution envision the future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that shared vision. It provides a framework by which day-to-day decisions are made and provides a template against which all such decisions can be evaluated. From the Strategic Plan the Institutional Plan and all organizational short-term plans are generated. The Strategic Plan boldly states the mission, core values, and state directives/legal requirements. It will provide the basis for creating and executing institutional and departmental plans and objectives and establishing budget priorities. Each year all plans should be reviewed and updated based on current trends and conditions. Timely implementation and continuous improvement through assessment and evaluation will ensure the success of the planning process. As an important and often not considered element is the inclusion of an institutional effectiveness component as a planning initiative.

Because the process is highly participatory, it fosters support and legitimacy from all areas of the institution. The institution would benefit from including external environmental scanning results and concentrating planning with input from outside and within the institution. The dialogue between the participants in the planning process improves the understanding of the institution as a whole and encourages a sense of ownership of the strategic plan and for all major institutional plans.

Component #1 Community Engagement – This grassroots approach, which Casper College has used, enhances understanding, involvement, buy-in, but most importantly the community engagement process puts more people in the decision-making circle. Critical to this process is to make sure the work sessions are citizens-led and that true two-way communications exists.

Component #2 Internal Process – In the development of the strategic plan and institutional plans, it is often beneficial to organize a team for each planning topic. Each team would be composed of representatives of students, faculty, staff, and the trustees. Each respective team would determine specific goals and action plans for the area being studied. Also, the input from the community engagement process would be included in the team discussions. All teams would come together to share their recommendations in an overall college-wide forum. Input would then be sought from all college personnel. Following the process of collecting input from the general college population, a draft of the strategic plan, institutional plan, and other related plans would be presented through the college organizational structure and eventually to the Board of Trustees for adoption. It is important to keep the college personnel and those who participated from the community informed throughout the process.

A definitive planning process will enhance internal and external communications and provide for various perspectives into determining the future direction of the institution.

The results of this process will then drive the budget. This process is also supported by the principles of the “Servant-Leader” style of leadership. Tenets of Servant-leadership not only enhance internal communications (a requisite characteristic of leaders who see themselves as servants) but also by empowering personnel to develop leadership skills.

E. Policies and Procedures Manual

Although work is underway for updating, revising, and completing the policies and procedures for the institution, the Team strongly recommends this process be continued and a process be installed for keeping current the policies and procedures of the institution. Each respective division would generally develop the policies procedures needed to be reviewed for updating and those needed to be established or eliminated. The model would require the major divisions of Administrative Services, Student Services, Instructional Services, and Offices of the Executive Services to establish teams for addressing, researching, and formulating the needed language. Each group would organize a team for this purpose comprised of students, faculty, and staff. Members of the trustees may wish to participate as well. Casper College is now separating policies from procedures, which is good. It is important to note the procedures should reflect provisions for internal control along with regular processes. Drafts of formulated language would be forwarded by each team through the institutional decision-making process and finally to the Board for policy adoption. Updating the Board By-Laws should also be a part of the model. It is suggested the Manual be separated by division and made available to the college family and public online through the College website. Manuals could also be made available in each major division office.

F. Diversity

In reference to the Commission Statement on Diversity, February 3, 2003, the statement reads, in part:

The Commission urges its member organizations to create and maintain teaching and learning environments that provide educational opportunities for diverse individuals and groups. In addition, the Commission urges its member organizations to provide learning environments, larger than its classroom settings, in which students can contribute to and learn from the diversity that broad life exposure offers. The Commission recognizes the value that member organizations place on their histories, traditions, and mission and the effect of such factors on their policies and practices. Therefore, the Commission does not prescribe a set of actions to address issues of diversity. However, through its Criteria, the Commission does expect its member organizations to evidence positive responses to issues of diversity and to show the relationship of those responses to the integrity of their operations [*Handbook of Accreditation*, 3rd ed., p. 3.4.1].

Examples that demonstrate Casper College’s positive responses to diversity are:

1. Diversity is a core value of the College and reads: “Encourage diversity of thought, culture and experience.”

2. The eighth of the top 11 College goals reads: "Increasing diversity within student, faculty, and staff populations."
3. The College Strategic Plan also includes statements supporting diversity.
4. In its Title VI nondiscrimination statement, the College states: "Casper College is committed to the philosophy of equal opportunity in education and employment and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, disability, or military service."
5. Casper College offers opportunities for students to study and travel abroad and to experience international influences on campus.
6. The Department of International Education was created in 2006 at the College to foster an: "Institutional climate that fully supports international education and cross-cultural awareness in order to prepare students for a global environment."
7. Students enrolled at the College represent fifteen countries.
8. The College has a program in International Studies that offers a broad interdisciplinary curriculum with an emphasis on world affairs.
9. In 1999, the College organized a Diversity Committee to "study ways in which Casper College can embrace diversity in the workplace and foster respect for all individuals."
10. Casper College's minority population increased from 4.6 percent in 2004-05 to 5.1 percent in 2007-08.

Although much is being done in addressing diversity, the HLC team would suggest that Casper College continue to support the Diversity Committee and the initiatives for increasing the diversity of the institution's students and personnel. It is important to note the College demonstrates a commitment to diversity through policies, practices, and programs. Nevertheless, there are some disparities in the ethnic diversity of College personnel relative to the proportions of major cultural or ethnic populations of the district. As a strategic priority, diversity objectives must be supportive throughout the institution. Attention should be focused on the institution being proactive in ensuring minorities are sought out from graduate schools and other organizations to become future employees. Specifically, the following are recommended to be continued and/or established:

1. A recruiting and hiring orientation-training program
2. Briefing of selection committees on legal issues, interviewing and selection processes in a fair and non-discriminatory manner
3. Utilization of in-service and workshops for "appreciation of cultures"
4. HR office use of diversity-targeted advertising for position vacancies
5. Create internships for Casper College students and University students
6. Partner with the University of Wyoming and other out of state universities on employing their graduates
7. Advise elementary, middle school, and high school students for the teaching profession at the community college level
8. Seek private grants for minority tuition scholarships
9. Create a bridge program for students to migrate from GED to college credit
10. Establish scholarships for GED graduates to continue their education at the college level and given the funding interest these could be two year scholarships

The team is understanding of the difficulty of attracting and retaining qualified minority personnel, but in the opinion of the team, the lack of district-balanced ethnic diversity among full-time personnel suggest that some deliberate efforts toward attaining greater diversity are in order. One of the deliberate efforts may be to target Casper College students who might have an interest to become college faculty members and then partner with the University of Wyoming to prepare them for transfer and on into graduate school. This could be followed up with internships at Casper College while university students.

Noticeably, ethnic diversity in Natrona County compared to Casper College follows:

| <u>Population</u> | <u>Natrona County</u> | <u>Casper College</u> | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| | | <u>Students</u> | <u>Employees</u> |
| White, not Hispanic | 91.4 | 94.40 | 93.20 |
| Black, or African American | 1.0 | .75 | .28 |
| Native Americans | 1.2 | .96 | .56 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | .4 | .53 | 2.82 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 5.1 | 2.76 | 3.10 |

Given the demographics, considering the 2006 data above, College employees are behind the county percentage for Hispanic/Latino, Native Americans, and African American populations. However, the College has an excellent representation of Asian employees compared to the County. The student population of minorities is fairly close to mirroring the County, with the possible exception of the Hispanic/Latino category. Certainly, with updated numbers the institution will be able to set annual benchmarks in attracting minority populations.

G. Development/Fund-Raising

The Casper College Foundation is very effective at supporting the College in planned giving, endowment matching scholarship funds, and capital projects, to name just a few of the many areas of support provided the College by the Foundation. The Foundation structure allows for six representatives from the College to vote on the Board of Directors, namely: President, Vice President of Administrative Services, and four Trustees. Given this structure there is a close relationship between the College and Foundation. As such, the Foundation is responsive because it is involved and aligned with the College’s needs and priorities.

The role of the Foundation is critical to the future of the College. Community college foundations across the nation are expanding and becoming extremely active in assisting institutions with needed resources in an era of declining tax revenues. It is through monies raised by these organizations that community colleges can assist students with tuition scholarship assistance, support emerging technology, and help institutions construct facilities. Additionally, foundations are assisting community colleges with “friend-raising” through sponsoring institutional events and activities along with serving as community ambassadors.

In order to serve an even greater role in supporting community colleges, some foundations are amending their by-laws to form a structure similar to a corporate structure. As an example, three classes of foundation trustees (Class of 2009, 2010, and 2011) of 50 per class could be recruited and inducted with a major role of: electing annually the Foundation Board of Directors, act on foundation trustee nominations, be formal ambassadors for the College, and assist the Foundation with fund raising. The Foundation Trustees would meet just annually. Through this model, the Foundation would continue to be managed by the Board of Directors. Having 150 foundation trustees (synonymous with stockholders) formally connected to the College through the Foundation would provide for an expanded number of individuals representing the institution. These foundation trustees serve a great role as ambassadors and are proud to be formally connected to the institution. This is just a way in which to expand the community involvement with the College. The benefits are enormous under this model. The expanded structure provides for more opportunities to gain leads for planned and annual giving along with assisting with other initiatives. The key element of the structure is the fact that the institution will have 150 more prominent citizens officially and formally connected to Casper College. These individuals will also be an excellent source for gaining community input and relaying information to Casper College.

H. Marketing

Casper College's Marketing Office has designed and published an outstanding series of program brochures and promotional materials. These documents are very attractive and professional in appearance. Although Casper College has a Marketing Plan that is functional, it could be strengthened through connecting the development of the plan more closely with the admissions and instructional leadership team. The Marketing Plan should further address marketing strategies customized to promote each educational program and initiative. It is also important for the marketing staff to be totally connected to the admissions and instructional team of officers. This connection will provide the marketing staff with the needed guidance and direction for responding to the changing needs of the institution and in particular for marketing target audiences. The Marketing Plan should be in alignment with the Enrollment Plan in supporting the enrollment initiatives and targeted programs. Additionally, HR operations would need the expertise and direction of the marketing staff for targeting information in the area of expanding diversity for promoting the College and programs for diverse populations.

I. Future Financial Stability

The College does an excellent job of managing and accounting for the institutional financial resources. The annual audits and financial reports clearly reflect effective internal controls and institutional compliance with generally accepted accounting principles. Further, the College experienced a modest increase of \$22 million in assessed valuation of Natrona County from 2007 to 2008, as future increases are predicted to be positive. Additionally, the State of Wyoming continues to project positive financial growth as projected in the most recent Consensus Revenue Estimating Group (CREG). The 2008 Legislature provided a five percent increase in the general fund formula

distribution for 2009 when compared to 2008 actual. In addition, an estimated \$2.9 million will be provided for health insurance reimbursements compared to approximately \$2.4 million for 2008. Further, the College enrollments are stable with a modest annual growth; thus, stabilizing the projected tuition and fees for the institution.

In November 2008, the community gave their approval for the College to issue \$35 million in general obligation bonds. Funds from the bonds will be used for projects that support expansion of academic programs, workforce development, student development and learning, and the partnership between the University of Wyoming and Casper College. Approval of the bond issue sets Casper College on course to complete its 25 year master plan, which will cost about \$105 million and add more than 100,000 square feet of new space for academic programs and instructional support.

In 2008, the Legislature established the Community College Planning Task Force to review and evaluate the existing community college system and to develop recommendations addressing various components of the community college system. Their focus has been on the development of a strategic plan for the Wyoming Community College Commission, operational funding, and capital construction. Discussions of operational funding have been focused on the development of a maximum loss provision to provide stable base funding in a period of declining enrollment and the interpretation of the use of college reserves, which has been increased by the Legislature from three to eight percent for each community college. Casper College has achieved the eight percent reserve ceiling, which strengthens its future financial position.

J. Advising

A number of students mentioned concerns about issues related to advising. They questioned whether they had taken courses that were not needed for graduation and expressed unease about the transferability to four-year institutions of courses they had already completed. These concerns highlighted a weakness in the services offered at Casper College. Casper College does not offer students a cohesive, well-organized advising program. Counselors whose primary responsibility is dealing with psychological problems also advise undecided students. When a student declares a major, he or she is then assigned to a faculty advisor who teaches courses in that area. The focus is on selection of courses and it was not apparent that either the counselors or the faculty advisors received any formal training in advising.

In response to the increase in first-generation students, many colleges have developed a robust advising program. In addition to assisting the student with course enrollment advisors are the nexus for information about college policies and procedures, the availability and method of obtaining a wide range of college and community services and an ombudsman for the student who needs guidance when problems occur. First-generation students, in particular, benefit from developing connections with faculty and staff. A well-organized advising program creates an excellent opportunity for these kinds of connections to develop. Such connections help to increase retention rates and can become a marketing strategy when discussing the services provided by the College with students and their families.

A well-developed advising program requires three things. First, advisors, whether they are professional full-time advisors, counselors or faculty, need regular on-going training. This training, at a minimum, should include interviewing skills, updates on college policies and procedures, the availability of academic tutoring, counseling, financial and health services and a clear understanding of articulation agreements that exist between the college where they are employed and the baccalaureate institutions to which the students typically transfer. Second, methods for evaluating advisors need to be implemented, and third, good advising needs to be rewarded in the same way that proficiency in other aspects of the college environment are acknowledged and rewarded. Such a program assists in increasing the retention rate, enhances the moral of students and improves the image of the school as being a student-centered institution.

K. Assessment of Student Learning

In 2003, the Higher Learning Commission adopted a revised position statement on the assessment of student learning (see section 3.4-2 of the *Handbook of Accreditation*, Third Edition) which reaffirms that assessment of student learning is an essential component of every organization's effort to evaluate overall organizational effectiveness. Through the Criteria for Accreditation and multiple Core Components, the Commission makes clear the centrality of student learning to effective higher education organizations. The Commission Statement on Assessment of Student Learning states that the program to assess student learning should "provide explicit and public statements regarding the institution's expectations for student learning." In addition, the *Handbook for Accreditation* states that the patterns of evidence will document "proficiency in skills and competencies essential for all college-educated adults." The Commission further asserts that effective assessment is best understood as a strategy for understanding, confirming, and improving student learning. The team found little evidence that the institution has an assessment program with "structured processes that are continuous and that provide meaningful and useful information to the planning processes as well as to students, faculty and administration" or that there is an explicit or consistent expectation of a core of general education skills and competencies for program completers or that the faculty have a common rubric for assessing the achievement of those skills and competencies.

Casper College has, however, made progress in assessing student learning at the course level since the last comprehensive visit in 1999. The college submitted a required monitoring report on this topic in 2002 and followed that report with a required progress report in 2003. For all intents and purposes, actions on that report were not sustained. However, with a new president and a change in other senior administrative positions progress in assessment was made. As the upcoming self-study approached, an Assessment Director was hired in 2007 and efforts renewed with progress in key areas noted. However, the Director resigned in 2008 and that position remained vacant until the visit in March of 2009, stalling the progress that had begun in 2007.

The general education components of the various associate degrees at Casper do not have a consistent core. Until the faculty determines the base line of competence that students must achieve in the identified general education areas, there will be limited success in

assessment of the general education portion of each program. The College must accept the challenge of providing every degree student with a coherent general education and develop a measurement system to determine if completers have actually achieved these competencies.

In order to transition to a more mature level of assessment of student learning outcomes, the team suggests that Casper continue its efforts to fully implement its outcomes assessment plan in the programs and across the college. Specific areas that need to be strengthened as the institution moves this initiative forward include:

1. General Education – the institution needs to clearly define the general education competencies expected of all degree graduates and then build an assessment program to measure whether or not graduates are attaining these competencies. The current focus on general education courses and/or competencies within specific courses indicates that there may not be a common understanding of the overall general education competencies published in the catalog and that these same competencies are not yet being assessed at a comprehensive, college-wide level.

General education outcomes should:

- a. be coherently and consistently defined across the campus and the system
 - b. be consistently assessed using common rubrics
 - c. be assessed using common methods to measure learning
 - d. have expected levels of performance established
 - e. have data collected and results analyzed
 - f. improve based on analysis of results
2. Consistency throughout the institution – while several programs have established and implemented outcomes assessment plans, others do not yet understand the outcomes assessment initiative. In some cases, department/programs have developed plans that:
 - a. Haven't been implemented, or
 - b. Include measurement tools that may be difficult to implement and/or interpret
 - c. Include measurement tools that don't actually measure the learning that is occurring as a result of the course/program.
 3. Expected and acceptable levels of achievement have yet to be identified. These benchmarks, once in place, will help the institution identify the areas of the curriculum in most need of improvement to meet desired levels of student achievement.

The team suggests additional steps in the assessment of student learning:

1. Develop a multi-year plan
2. Continue to emphasize faculty and staff development and training in assessment practices.
3. Design, test, revise, implement, and evaluate varied approaches.
4. Incorporate multiple measures in all efforts
5. As approaches, strategies, and outcomes emerge, document how the information is used to change courses, to change programs or scheduling or pedagogy. Cite how outcomes assessment triggers changes in teaching and learning.
6. Use the outcomes to support reallocation of current resources within the college and to justify priority project requests. Once established, it is the outcomes, not the assessment strategy, that need to be linked to budget processes.

At present, the current level of implementation is neither comprehensive nor systematic. The College should consider identifying clear target dates for accomplishing feedback loops at all levels of assessment and developing organizational and conceptual links to strategic planning, budgeting and overall institutional effectiveness.

Lastly, while the College has a well-defined program review process, assessment results regarding the state of student learning in the programs should be incorporated into the reviews of the academic programs.

L. Faculty Credentials and Professional Development Plans

A review of the credentials of faculty indicated that most faculty are appropriately qualified for their assigned positions. Most faculty in transfer programs have at least a Master's degree. Most faculty in career and technical programs have at least a Bachelor's degree. In those cases where faculty do not hold the appropriate degree however, many do have the appropriate professional experience. It would be the recommendation of the team that faculty and their immediate supervisor agree upon a professional development plan that will identify a timeline for achieving the appropriate qualifications for the assigned position. Individual faculty plans should identify projected completion dates and annual progress towards completion, making monitoring easy and adding a sense of urgency toward completion of the requirements.

M. Faculty Evaluation

Faculty evaluation at the College is not systematic. According to the Vice President of Academic Affairs, each division chair has been responsible for faculty evaluations and each chair has performed those evaluations with varying degrees of effectiveness. With a new administrative structure set to be implemented with the new fiscal year, the process will become the responsibility of the new deans. The team recommends that the College, with faculty input, establish and implement an institution-wide procedure for faculty

evaluation and the collaborative process of building professional development plans based on the results of the evaluation.

N. General Education

As a result of the previous comprehensive visit in 1999, Casper College was required to submit a Monitoring Report on the Assessment of Student Academic Achievement, General Education, and Institutional Planning (including Faculty and Staff Evaluation). As noted in the Assurance Section of this report, the current Higher Learning Commission Team also has concerns about Casper College's general education requirements.

According to the Commission Statement on General Education:

Regardless of how a higher learning organization frames the general education necessary to fulfill its mission and goals, it clearly and publicly articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of the general education it provides for its students. It also shows its commitment to the centrality of general education by including an appropriate component of general education in all undergraduate programs of substantial length, whether they lead to certificates, diplomas, or degrees. Moreover, the organization's faculty exercises oversight for general education and, working with the administration, regularly assesses its effectiveness against the organization's stated goals for student learning [*Handbook of Accreditation*, 3rd ed., p. 3.4.3].

Consistent with Higher Learning Commission expectations, Casper College has a publicly-stated general education philosophy. It also requires general education in all of its degree programs. However, the General Education Requirements (GERs) listed on pages 23-24 of the 2008-2009 College Catalog are not general education requirements in the sense that they apply to all graduates of the College, regardless of their degree program. Instead, they are requirements only for the Associate of Arts, Associate of Business, and Associate of Science degrees.

The Team is also concerned that some of the courses that fulfill general education requirements in the Associate of Applied Science (AAS) programs are remedial in nature. Remedial or developmental classes are, almost by definition, not college-level courses. For example, in many AAS programs, students can fulfill their general education Communications requirement by taking ENGL 0500 (Reading for Success), ENGL 0510 (Fundamentals of Reading), and other developmental courses. As noted in the Commission Statement on General Education, "From an organization's general education, a student acquires a breadth of knowledge in the areas and proficiency in the skills that the organization identifies as hallmarks of being *college* educated" [*Handbook of Accreditation*, p. 3.4.3; emphasis added]. General education is one of the things that distinguishes "higher education" from other forms of postsecondary education, such as the vocational education typically offered by trade schools. Casper College's current low expectation for student learning in its occupational programs compromises the integrity

of the Associate of Applied Science degree and provides graduates of these programs with inadequate preparation for lifelong learning.

The Progress Report on General Education should include the following elements:

- a. A description of the revised requirements for the College's Associate of Applied Science degrees. These revised requirements should not allow students to use remedial or developmental coursework to fulfill the College's general education requirements.
- b. A revised statement of the College's goals or intended learning outcomes for general education. These goals for general education should apply to all graduates of the College, regardless of their degree program. In other words, they should apply to its Associate of Applied Science and Associate of Fine Arts graduates as well as its Associate of Arts, Associate of Business, and Associate of Science graduates.
- c. A plan for assessing all of these general education goals or intended learning outcomes and using the results of assessment to improve student learning and inform the planning and budgeting process.

The Team recommends the following books as valuable guides to revising and assessing general education programs: Andrea Leskes and Ross Miller, *General Education: A Self-Study Guide for Review & Assessment* (AAC&U, 2005); Andrea Leskes and Barbara D. Wright, *The Art & Science of Assessing General Education Outcomes: A Practical Guide* (AAC&U, 2005); and Mary J. Allen, *Assessing General Education Programs* (Anker Publishing, 2006).