



A Concise Guide to

CMU'S RE-AFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION BY THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

November 18-20, 2013

Self-Study Quick Facts

What is accreditation and why is it important?

- Serves as a process of institutional self-evaluation and continuous improvement.
- Demonstrates compliance with criteria specified by CMU's accrediting body, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).
- Provides public assurance and validation of the quality of education at CMU to its degree-holders seeking jobs or admission to graduate programs around the country.
- Establishes eligibility of CMU students for federal financial aid.
- Fulfills a requirement for CMU programs that pursue specialized accreditation.

Who accredits CMU?

- CMU is accredited by a national association, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.
- CMU has had continuous accreditation since 1957.
- Re-affirmation of accreditation occurs at 10-year intervals.

How does re-affirmation of accreditation work?

- Re-affirmation of accreditation requires an in-depth self-study of every aspect of CMU. The current process has been ongoing over the last two years, with the results formally articulated in CMU's Self-Study Report sent to the HLC in September 2013.
- A site visit by an HLC evaluation team is scheduled for November 18 – 20, 2013. Team members will conduct

interviews with the campus community, including students, faculty and staff members, administration, the Self-Study Steering Committee, the Board of Trustees, and the Grand Junction area.

- The HLC Evaluation Team will meet with representatives of the Montrose and Western Colorado Community College campuses.

What is the Self-Study?

- The self-study was carried out by the collaborative efforts of members of the CMU campus. It involved two years of researching and writing, and it addresses the HLC's five criteria for accreditation. (See the overview on the following pages.)

How can I prepare for the HLC visit?

- You should be familiar with CMU's mission and vision for 2020. You should be able to articulate how your role at CMU helps to fulfill the mission.
- You should be aware of who the HLC is and why they are visiting our campus.
- You should be ready to respond to questions related to the criteria and their components that you may be asked by a member of the visiting team.

Where can I review the CMU mission and vision?

- Both are included in the institution's Catalog, the University's Strategic Plan, and CMU website. (Also see the box at the top of the next page.)

Colorado Mesa University Mission

The role and mission of CMU is specified in legislation by the Colorado General Assembly.

Legislative Mission Statement

There is hereby established a university at Grand Junction, to be known as Colorado Mesa University, which shall be a general baccalaureate and graduate institution with selective admission standards. Colorado Mesa University shall offer liberal arts and sciences, professional, and technical degree programs and a limited number of graduate programs. Colorado Mesa University shall also maintain a community college role and mission, including career and technical education programs. Colorado Mesa University shall receive resident credit for two-year

course offerings in its commission-approved service area. Colorado Mesa University shall also serve as a regional education provider.

Institutional Mission Statement

Committed to a personal approach, Colorado Mesa University is a dynamic learning environment that offers abundant opportunities for students and the larger community to grow intellectually, professionally, and personally. By celebrating exceptional teaching, academic excellence, scholarly and creative activities, and by encouraging diversity, critical thinking, and social responsibility, CMU advances the common good of Colorado and beyond.

Overview of the 2013 CMU Self-Study

(Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate specific Self-Study criteria (and components) or evidence items where related information can be found.)

Introduction

- Overview of CMU
- Significant developments at CMU since 2003
- Goals of the Self-Study

Criterion 1, Mission

CMU's "mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations."

- Presents evidence related to the development, clarity, availability, and utilization of CMU's mission statements.
- Describes the consistency of CMU's mission statements related to academic processes, diversity, the University's role in a multicultural society, and its commitment to the public good.
- Documents CMU's mission as the basis for the 2020 Vision and Values statements, the 2011 Strategic Plan, and the 2011 Performance Contract Report.

Key Findings – Strengths

- CMU's Mission, Vision and Values Statements and all other supplemental statements and documents are clear, vital to the institution and available to the public, and provide a framework for the University's planning and budgeting processes. (1A2-1, 1A3-1, 1B1-1)
- CMU offers accessible regional higher education for the public, is flexible in using alternative course delivery methods, and provides a diverse set of programs and certificates at the undergraduate and graduate levels, thus reflecting its responsiveness to the needs of Western Colorado. (1A2-2, 1A2-4, 1D3-1, 1D3-2)
- CMU is committed to its relationship with the community as a full and active partner with various businesses and government agencies. (1D1-1, 1D1-7, 1D3-1)

Key Findings – Recommendations

- CMU should establish and clearly articulate the mission, role, scope, and intended constituents of its two-year division, Western Colorado Community College. Additionally, CMU should make clear how its two-year and four-year divisions are differentiated and integrated within the context of accomplishing the institution's overall mission. (1B3-2)
- CMU should build on its current efforts and processes to actively recruit and retain faculty, staff, and students from all backgrounds to further enrich the diversity of the campus community. As CMU makes additional full-time faculty and staff hires, continued efforts should be made to find candidates from diverse backgrounds. The University should also move forward with setting goals for increasing enrollments from underserved populations and ensuring greater student success rates among the same. The University recognizes the value of enriching the campus community with increased diversity, and while there are active efforts to promote diversity at CMU, continuous attention is needed. In this regard, the University should direct additional efforts toward supporting a campus culture of respect and understanding among students, faculty, staff, and the community at large. (1.C.1., 1.C.2.)

Criterion 2, Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

"The institution acts with integrity: its conduct is ethical and responsible."

- Documents practices that provide full disclosure of information.
- Presents evidence of policies that ensure, require, and enforce ethical conduct across campus, based on Colorado's State Code of Ethics, various CMU policy and procedure manuals and handbooks, and accrediting organization standards.

Key Findings – Strengths

- CMU follows clearly written policies and procedures that

guide its personnel, students, and business decision-making processes. (2.A.)

- Students take an active role in determining the purposes, roles, and rates of student fees. The fees are made transparent to the student decision-makers. (2A-2)

Key Findings – Recommendations

- CMU should make clear to potential and current students which programs are delivered by CMU's four-year division and those that are offered by WCCC in all of its marketing materials, including the CMU and WCCC websites. (2B-2)

Criterion 3, Teaching and Learning—Quality, Resources, and Support

CMU "provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered."

- Discusses currency of programs and level of performance required, articulation of student learning outcomes, monitoring of quality and consistency of general education courses and degree programs.
- Presents evidence that students engage in processing information, mastering modes of inquiry or creative work, and developing skills adaptable to a changing environment.
- Discusses how programs weave human and cultural diversity into their curricula.
- Documents qualifications of faculty and staff members who are guided by a student-centered philosophy.
- Focuses on the achievement of CMU's mission through the delivery of academic and student support services and co-curricular programs that enhance the quality of education offered.

Key Findings – Strengths

- CMU's programs are rigorous and current. (3A1-1, 3A1-2)
- CMU's faculty and student body participate vigorously in scholarship activity. (3B5-1, 3B5-2)
- CMU faculty participation in service and committee work ensures that faculty expertise and input are integral to the decisions and policies of the institution. (3C1-3)
- CMU maintains a safe and secure campus, which creates a welcoming and enjoyable environment for students. (3D1-6)
- CMU has many programs and processes in place to optimize student success in terms of placement and preparedness for academic life. (3.D.2.)
- CMU provides excellent advising services for students. (3.D.3.)
- CMU has created a positive learning environment for its students by hiring and retaining highly qualified faculty, building and maintaining exemplary facilities, and developing and sustaining technology that supports effective teaching and learning. (3.D.4.)

Key Findings – Recommendations

- CMU and WCCC full-time faculty members not holding a degree at least one level higher than the courses they

teach should have a professional development plan that leads to degree completion. (3C2-2, 3C2-3)

- CMU should better ensure the comparability, rigor, and consistency of courses taught in multiple modalities and at multiple locations, particularly those offered through the High School Scholars program. A "White Paper" was developed which contains recommendations for achieving consistency of courses. These recommendations were formally adopted by the Academic Council in spring 2012. Processes for ensuring implementation should be put in place. Methods should also be implemented to better combine the efforts of personnel at the WCCC campus with the academic department heads who have the responsibility for the courses being taught in the high schools. (3.A.3.)
- The University should develop an operational plan for the continued development of a more vigorous and inviting culture for its graduate students. CMU should coordinate application, admission, registration and financial aid processes for its graduate students in a centralized location with a dedicated staff. In addition, CMU should work to promote increased support for both faculty and students in graduate programs. (3D3-8)

Criterion 4: Teaching and Learning--Evaluation and Improvement

CMU "demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement."

- Examines how general education and degree programs are reviewed, credit given for course work, graduate success, assessment, retention, persistence, and graduation rates.

Key Findings – Strengths

- CMU is committed to demonstrating the quality of education it provides for all of its students. (4.A.)
- CMU has integrated program review and assessment into the University culture. (4.A.1., 4B1-1)
- Positive changes in retention and completion rates resulted from the implementation of recommendations from the Working Group to Improve Student Academic Success. (4B3-2)

Key Findings – Recommendations

- The University should continue its initiatives for involving all faculty members in assessment and for implementing program changes based on assessment outcomes. Faculty members will continue to develop assessment plans based on the program learning outcomes that were created in 2012-13. Departments will begin structured data collection in fall 2013. The Assessment Committee has been tasked with critically reviewing all program assessment plans and working with programs to assure compliance. Revisions in the program review manual also include an enhanced assessment review process. (4.B.4.)

- CMU should work to connect assessment of student learning on the main campus more closely to assessment on the Montrose and WCCC campuses. Course assessment and evaluation also need to be expanded to include the High School Scholars Program. (4A4-5, 4A4-6)
- As CMU monitors assessment of program effectiveness in co-curricular activities, it should also continue to develop assessment of student learning in these areas. Both academic departments and academic and student service support offices will work in the curricular and co-curricular aspects of student learning. As assessment is strengthened across the campus, continuous improvement will be evident not only in academic areas but in the co-curricular areas, student services, and campus life as well. (4B2-2)

Criterion 5: Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

CMU's "resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities." CMU "plans for the future."

- Examines linkages of planning and budgeting processes, ways those processes support CMU's mission and vision, and adaptations by the University to changes in the higher education environment.

Key Findings – Strengths

- The successful 2003 reorganization of CMU's governing structure resulted in CMU having its own Board of Trustees and yielded many benefits for the institution. The Board of Trustees provides appropriate oversight in financial, academic, legal, and fiduciary matters. (5B Intro., 5.B.2.)
- CMU has been able to successfully navigate the highly changeable and challenging resource environment of the past decade and improve its outcomes and performance. (5.A.1.)
- The CMU Strategic Plan was developed by broad constituencies and guides the planning and operations of the institution. The Strategic Plan is revisited on a regular basis. Campus-wide planning activities are linked to and driven by the Strategic Plan. (5.C.1., 5.C.3.)
- CMU works systematically to improve its operational performance. By implementing strategies for improvement, the institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability. (5.D.2.)
- CMU has made substantial investments in new facilities and technologies to enhance instructional delivery. (5A1-4, 5A1-5)
- Faculty, staff, students, and external constituencies have multiple means of formal communication with the Board of Trustees and the administrative members at CMU. (5.B.1., 5.B.3.)
- CMU's budget process follows the guiding principles related to the University's priorities and strategic initiatives. (5.A.5.)

Key Findings – Recommendations

- CMU should appoint a working group that represents the stakeholders of CMU, WCCC, and the Grand Valley Board of Cooperative Educational Services to evaluate the successes, challenges, and future of the University's two-year division, Western Colorado Community College. Once the future framework is established, a strategic plan that guides subsequent operational planning and budgeting for WCCC should be developed. (5A4-1)
- As the University plans for future full-time hires, it should balance the needs for additional staff positions, resulting from the recent significant growth of the institution, with those for faculty members. (5A1-3)
- CMU should implement a process for formally evaluating and prioritizing future technology investments using a business model that leverages campus-wide solutions, takes advantage of economies of scale, and aligns expenditures with strategic initiatives. The process should assist with assessing technology solutions, scheduling projects within staff resources, and allocating campus resources within the broader institutional goals. (5A1-5)

Conclusion

CMU is ". . . an effective institution that delivers rigorous, yet accessible, programs to a wide variety of students. Effective academic programs, and the services necessary to support them, are recognized as the foundation of the University. Programs and services are supported by student and faculty scholarship, active collaboration in academic planning and decision-making, and information sharing by the many components of the institution. CMU's close ties to the community and its clear and public statements about its nature and purpose have helped the University to increase regional accessibility via multiple modes of course delivery and variety in the program options it offers. All of this has been made possible, even through economically challenging times, by a clear strategic vision, sound fiscal planning, and the effective leveraging of traditional and non-traditional resources."

"It is clear that the University is not only fulfilling its mission with integrity, but that it is also well-positioned to face the social, technology, and demographic changes that may challenge CMU in the future... CMU is confident in requesting re-affirmation and anticipates the opportunities for growth that will be afforded the institution as it moves forward."

Appendices

List of supporting documents and Federal Compliance documentation.

For additional information:

- <http://www.coloradomesa.edu/self-study> (pdf format)
- home tab on MAVzone (self-study with links)
- Self-Study Co-Chairs:
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