

WYOMING COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Annual Accreditation Report

April 1, 2004-March 31, 2005



**WYOMING COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMMISSION
2020 CAREY AVENUE, 8TH FLOOR
CHEYENNE, WYOMING 82002
(307) 777-7763
www.communitycolleges.wy.edu**

ACCREDITATION BY THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC), a commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA), accredits Wyoming's seven community colleges. Institutional accreditation is a voluntary process that serves the critical purposes of quality assurance and institutional and program improvement. Colleges that are accredited by the HLC continually evaluate their programs and overall institutions in light of the criteria for accreditation set forth by the HLC.

Currently, most of the Wyoming community colleges follow the HLC Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) to maintain accreditation status. The PEAQ process for institutional accreditation is a continuous cycle. For approximately two years the institution conducts a Self-Study, which critically assesses all programs and aspects of the institution. Next, a team of peer evaluators conducts a Comprehensive Visit. The Team critically evaluates the Self-Study Report and the institution during the visit and subsequently makes a recommendation about reaffirmation of accreditation status. Some institutions are granted continued status with the stipulation that the institutions provide a written report (Progress, Monitoring, or Contingency) within a specified time period or a possible focused visit to examine specific aspects of an institution. The longest time period continued institutional accreditation is reaffirmed by the HLC is for ten years.

An alternate method by which colleges can maintain accreditation status is an HLC program called Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). Wyoming colleges have the option of applying to become part of the Academic Quality Improvement Program if they prefer a different approach to accreditation. AQIP is a program built around quality improvement principles with a focus on goal-setting, networking, and accountability activities. The college engages in all AQIP processes (Strategy Forums, Annual Updates, Systems Portfolio Appraisals) and visits during a seven-year period. Currently, one Wyoming community college has applied and been accepted into AQIP.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION

- 1. Mission and Integrity:** the institution “operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.”
- 2. Preparing for the Future:** the institution’s “allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.”
- 3. Student Learning and Effective Teaching:** the institution “provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.”
- 4. Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge:** the institution “promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.”
- 5. Engagement and Service:** “as called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.”

WYOMING COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACCREDITATION ACTIVITY 2004-2005

Because continued institutional accreditation is reaffirmed for various periods of time and institutions applied for candidacy at various times in the past, each of the Wyoming community colleges is at a different phase of the on-going institutional accreditation process. During the time period of April 1, 2004 to March 31, 2005 five of the seven Wyoming community colleges had institutional accreditation activity. This summary is provided in compliance with W.S. 21-18-202(e)(i), which requires the Community College Commission to “report the findings of institutional and specialized accreditation studies.”

CASPER COLLEGE

Casper College submitted a Request for Institutional Change seeking to obtain accreditation to deliver existing degrees and certificates via distance education, particularly online. The college expects the major

outcome of this change to be an increase in the opportunities and services for its students and to serve potential students that may not have been served with only traditional offerings. HLC visited Casper College May 9-10, 2005 in response to this request. An official decision had not been received by the printing of this report. Casper College's next Comprehensive Visit is scheduled for 2008-2009.

CENTRAL WYOMING COLLEGE

Central Wyoming College (CWC) in Riverton has been actively involved in the Self-Study process in preparation for its next Comprehensive Visit scheduled for October 2005. The Self-Study process was initiated during the 2002-2003 academic year. A coordinator was appointed, steering committee formed, and criterion teams developed. Criterion teams were further subdivided into core component teams. Considerable study was done in regards to the new criteria and the types of evidence needed to support the new criteria. Gathering and interpretation of data began in spring 2004 and continued through the fall. The HLC liaison visited CWC in October 2004 to provide advice and feedback on the Self-Study process. In late fall 2004 teams began to draft the final Self-Study Report, which will be submitted to the Higher Learning Commission in August 2005.

EASTERN WYOMING COLLEGE

Eastern Wyoming College (EWC) in Torrington requested HLC's approval to offer four existing degrees by means of distance education as a Request for Institutional Change. The request centered around the Associate of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies, the Associate of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies, the Associate of Applied Science in Business Administration, and the Associate of Arts in Criminal Justice. The HLC sent a team in response to this request on April 24-26, 2005. An official decision had not been received by the printing of this report. Eastern Wyoming College's next Comprehensive Visit will be in 2010-2011.

LARAMIE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Laramie County Community College (LCCC) in Cheyenne hosted a Focused Visit from an HLC Evaluation Team on March 7-8, 2005. The visit fulfilled the requirement of a focused visit in three areas: (1) assessment of student academic achievement, (2) faculty/staff and administrative communication, and (3) shared governance and decision-making.¹

SHERIDAN COLLEGE

Sheridan College submitted an application to the Higher Learning Commission for acceptance into the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). In February 2005, Sheridan College received official notification of acceptance into the program. As an AQIP institution, Sheridan College will participate in a Strategy Forum in October 2005, develop a series of Action Projects to initiate the AQIP process, prepare a Systems Portfolio for Appraisal approximately three years later, and provide Annual Updates on Action Projects to HLC.

FUTURE ACTIVITY

During the next year, two colleges will have HLC accreditation activity. As stated above Central Wyoming College in Riverton will host a Comprehensive Visit in October 2005. Northwest College is required to submit a Monitoring Report on June 30, 2005 regarding its institutional assessment plan for general education and all academic programs with evidence of implementation.

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¹ Post March 31, 2005: The HLC determined that no further follow-ups were necessary for LCCC. The HLC also granted LCCC approval to offer online certificate and degree programs.