Year One Peer-Evaluation Report

Dixie State University
St. George, UT
Fall 2013

A confidential report of findings prepared for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
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Evaluation Committee

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Introduction

Dixie State University (DSU) is a publicly funded, open-admission state university within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE). DSU is located in St. George, Utah, the county seat of Washington County. St. George is situated in the extreme southwest corner of Utah, about 120 miles north of Las Vegas, Nevada, and approximately seven miles from the Arizona state border.

After several years of rapid enrollment growth, DSU enrollment declined slightly in 2012. Attributed to the recovery from the recession and higher employment rates, 2012 enrollment FTE of 6,539 (-1.0%) was down compared to fall semester 2011. Enrollment of 6295 FTE for fall semester 2013 is also a decline of 4.4%. As of July 1, 2013, there are 190 fulltime faculty; 61% of those faculty members hold a terminal degree in the field in which they teach.

In 2010, Utah Governor Gary Herbert called upon the State Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Higher Education to present a plan for Utah to meet the needs of students in the 21st century; subsequently, in December 2010, the Regents adopted an initiative entitled “Higher Ed Utah 2020.” The plan entailed a mission change to university status for Dixie State College. University preparation benchmarks were established by Regent directive. Upon meeting the benchmarks, Regent approval for university status was given and on February 16, 2013, the Governor pronounced the title and status change of the college to Dixie State University.

During October and November 2013, a two-person peer-evaluation team from the Commission conducted a Year One Peer Evaluation of Dixie State University in a distance environment. The peer evaluation was conducted based upon the Commission’s 2010 Accreditation Standards and Eligibility Requirements.


Recommendation #1:

The evaluators found current human and institutional resources insufficient for the rate of growth and expansion. Therefore, the evaluators recommend that the institution plan for and strengthen its human and institutional infrastructure to assure the integrity of its programs (Standards 2.B.2, 2.B.4, 5.B.1; Eligibility Requirement 10 and 24).

- The committee finds DSU has been very aggressive in addressing this recommendation and has significantly increased both its physical, and most
especially, its human resources. The committee commends DSU for their quick action and resource allocation shift.

Recommendation #2:

The evaluators found evidence of a great deal of activity concerning the assessment of student learning and core theme objectives. However, the evaluators did not find that the assessment of student learning was sufficiently conducted, documented or acted upon. Therefore, the evaluators recommend that the institution fulfill its plan to collect and analyze data to evaluate the accomplishment of core theme objectives and course and program outcomes, and use the data to inform program improvements and resource decisions in a consistent and systematic manner (Standards 3.B.3, 4.A.1, 4.A.3, 4.B.1, 4.B.2; Eligibility Requirement 22, 23, 24).

- The committee believes DSU has taken great strides ensuring assessment data is being collected, and the overall effort is being coordinated in part by two new administrative positions as well as a new assessment and accreditation committee (ISAAC).

Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report

DSU submitted a very clear, targeted, and straightforward Standard One Self-Evaluation Report. The report is laid out clearly, concisely, and makes it very easy for the reader to not only access the information requested, but also to understand the institution’s rationale behind each of its Core Themes, Objectives, and Indicators. The report is a clear testament to the professional and serious manner DSU brings to its assessment efforts, especially as they relate to mission fulfillment.

Report on Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility Requirement Two - Authority

On February 16, 2013, with the passing of House Bill 61, Governor Hubert pronounced the title and status change of Dixie State College of Utah to Dixie State University. Dixie State University (DSU) is a publicly funded, open-admissions, state university within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) and is authorized by the Utah State Legislature in Article X, Section 4, of the Utah State Constitution. Utah State Code, Title 53B, Chapter 1, establishes the Board of Regents and vests that body the power and authority with the “control, management, and supervision of the institutions of higher education. . . .”

Under Utah State Code 53B-1-101(2) and 53B-1-103, and Board of Regents’ Policy R220, delegation of responsibilities, effective communication, and consultation is conferred to an
institutional Board of Trustees. Board of Trustee members are appointed by the Governor. DSU administrators govern the university in accordance with Utah state code, and thus the College fulfills Eligibility Requirement #2.

Eligibility Requirement Three – Mission and Core Themes

In spring of 2013, revision of the mission statement was undertaken by ISAAC and the Deans’ Council, in consultation with the Higher Education Commissioner’s office. Discussion of a mission statement was opened on campus, several options were proffered and a survey was conducted of statement preferences. A final mission statement was chosen by majority vote. The Board of Trustees approved the mission statement on April 29, 2013, and it was approved by the Utah Board of Regents May 17, 2013, and thus the College fulfills Eligibility Requirement #3.

- The survey that was conducted is clearly noted, but it is not clear exactly who participated in the survey, and thus how broad the “community.” While not a significant problem, clarification would strengthen future reports.

Section One

Report on Standard 1.A: Mission

Mission Statement (1.A.1)

“Dixie State University is a teaching institution that strives to enrich its community and the lives of its students by promoting a culture of learning, values, and community.”

Acceptable threshold of Mission Fulfillment (1.A.2)

DSU determines mission fulfillment at the institutional level by holistically analyzing the alignment of performance with its mission, core themes, objectives and benchmarks. Evaluation at the institutional level is based primarily on three criteria: capacity and resource management; planning and implementation; and valid assessment and use of results for continuous improvement and sustainability. An annual assessment report is forwarded to the President’s executive staff, the 2nd Century Strategic Planning Committee, and the Board of Trustees for review and recommendations, and for use in strategic planning. The Institutional Strategic Assessment and Accreditation Committee (ISAAC) & administration will periodically assess the continued relevance of the institution’s mission, core themes and objectives.

Mission fulfillment at the core theme level is measured by indicators and benchmarks which were identified for the objectives and intended outcomes for each core theme. This strategy identifies meaningful performance expectations for acceptable fulfillment that will consistently
provide data for analysis at the program, department, or functional unit level. Those data will become tools for determining overall institutional achievement and needed courses of action.

Mission fulfillment at the program level is measured by individual departments or programs setting objectives that correspond to the institutional core themes and objectives and conducting regular assessment of their indicators and performance expectations, some of which provide data on institutional mission fulfillment. Program and institutional data collection will be monitored and coordinated by the Director of Program Assessment and Institutional Research, the Director of Academic Assessment, the Accreditation Liaison Officer, and the Implementation of Strategic Assessment and Accreditation Committee (ISAAC). Individual departments and programs will also conduct strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analyses and evaluate the level of their mission and objectives fulfillment and determine necessary action.

- DSU has created a multi-layered approach to evaluating its mission fulfillment. This process addresses institutional, core theme, and program level indicators, measures, and benchmarks. However, a clear articulation of acceptable threshold appears to be missing, or at least is not readily apparent. The process itself is clearly laid out, but it is unclear exactly how mission fulfillment is recognized.

**Report on Standard 1.B: Core Themes**

**Core Theme Identification (1.B.1)**

Core Theme One: **A Culture of Learning**

Dixie State University promotes a campus-wide culture of learning; delivers excellent teaching; and prepares knowledgeable and competent students who achieve their educational goals.

Core Theme Two: **A Culture of Values**

Dixie State University invests in a culture of values which include service, citizenship, diversity, ethics, and collaboration.

Core Theme Three: **A Culture of Community**

Dixie State University builds and maintains strong relationships between students, faculty, staff and community to foster economic growth and a continuum of educational, cultural and recreational enrichment.
Core Theme Objectives and Indicators (1.B.2):

Core Theme #1 – A Culture of Learning

DSU has identified four objectives and fifteen supporting indicators for its Core Theme of a Culture of Learning:

1. Foster a campus-wide culture of learning.
   - Indicator 1: Satisfaction of student resources & support services.
   - Indicator 2: Satisfaction of faculty/staff resources & support services.
   - Indicator #3: Number & variety of degree programs offered by school.
   - Indicator #4: Program goals align with academic & professional standards.
     - No concerns or additional comments on these indicators.

2. Deliver excellent teaching in a student centered environment.
   - Indicator 1: Faculty Credentials.
   - Indicator 2: Faculty participate in continued faculty professional development.
   - Indicator 3: Faculty report on pedagogical practices used, & the frequency of usage.
   - Indicator #4: Students report on the variety of pedagogical practices they experience, the frequency of usage.
   - Indicator #5: Small class sizes.
   - Indicator #6: Positive feedback from students & alumni.
   - Indicator #7: Positive faculty feedback.
     - No concerns or additional comments on these indicators.
3. Develop students’ knowledge and skills, enabling them to succeed in a changing and competitive world.

- Indicator #1: Student success in meeting General Education Requirements.
- Indicator #2: Student success in mastering the foundational knowledge & skills of their major.
  - No concerns or additional comments on these indicators.

4. Support student achievement of their educational goals.

- Indicator #1: Students progress towards their major & meeting their educational goals.
- Indicator #2: Students graduate.
  - No concerns or additional comments on these indicators.

**Core Theme #2 – A Culture of Values**

DSU has identified three objectives and nine supporting indicators for its Core Theme of a Culture of Values:

1. Engage students and employees in service and citizenship activities that enhance their Dixie State University experience.

- Indicator 1: Student experiences with meaningful, service learning.
  - “Meaningful” is a user-defined term. It would strengthen assessment efforts to have a working definition of “meaningful” that is recognized and utilized by anyone working with this Indicator.
- Indicator 2: Student reflections on engagement as part of their university experience.
  - No concerns or additional comments.
- Indicator #3: Students describe & analyze understandings of rights & obligations of citizenship.
Assuming GE refers to General Education classes and programs, it is not clear how this measure can be adequate, or appropriate, for this indicator. Assessment efforts might benefit from further clarification.

- Indicator #4: Faculty & staff participate in service and citizenship activities.
  - No concerns or additional comments.

2. Promote an environment of respect, responsible, and ethical behavior.

- Indicator 1: Syllabi contain expectations of students to exhibit ethical behavior in their coursework & campus activity.

- Indicator 2: Students engage in activities that analyze & promote discussion of ethical behavior.

- Indicator 3: Departments provide proper training with regard to policies & procedures.
  - No concerns or additional comments on these indicators. However; the Objective is somewhat confusing (grammatically). Rewording might provide for greater clarity.

3. Foster a climate of support and collaboration.

- Indicator 1: Employees build networks of support across campus.

- Indicator 2: Employees feel valued as part of the campus team.
  - The measures for this objective are all centered on surveys. While surveys are very useful, assessment efforts of this Objective might be strengthened by the addition of an independent or outside evaluation tool.

**Core Theme #3 – A Culture of Community**

DSU has identified three objectives and twelve supporting indicators for its Core Theme of a Culture of Community:
1. Enrich educational exchanges between community, businesses, and the university by providing effective high quality opportunities and partnerships.
   - Indicator 1: Participation by community in educational exchanges.
   - Indicator 2: Quality of educational exchanges.
   - Indicator 3: Participation by businesses in educational exchanges.
   - Indicator 4: Quality of educational exchanges.
     - The term “educational exchanges” appears to be left undefined, and thus open to broad interpretation. While room is needed for interpretation, a representative list of exchanges might aid assessment efforts.

2. Encourage economic development by assisting and supporting individuals, businesses and community organizations to nurture the growth of the regional economy.
   - Indicator 1: Number of programs created & types of support.
   - Indicator 2: Success of & satisfaction with the economic development programs.
     - The benchmark of these Indicators simply states “trend upward.” While this broad latitude for increase may be what is desired, assessment efforts might be aided by more concisely defining the desired increases. In addition, it is not readily apparent whose success and satisfaction is being measured.

3. Engage the campus and community by providing a variety of quality community educational programs and cultural, athletic, and social events.
   - Indicator 1: Number & variety of community educational programs offered.
   - Indicator 2: Quality & type of educational programs.
   - Indicator 3: Number & variety of cultural events offered.
   - Indicator 4: Quality & type of cultural events.
   - Indicator 5: Number & variety of athletic & social events offered.
• Indicator 6: Quality of athletic and social events.
  ▪ No concerns or additional comments on these indicators

Summary

This report provides a strong statement regarding the dedication of DSU to their students and their community. The faculty, staff, and administration have illustrated through the production of their Standard One Self-Evaluation Report they have put considerable time, effort, and thought into crafting the Mission and Core Themes of their institution. Their approach is very methodical and will result in a large amount of relevant data to be used to guiding future decisions. The committee feels DSU will be well served in the future by following the mission fulfillment plans currently laid out by the institution.

Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations:

1. The Evaluation Committee commends DSU for preparing a detailed, yet precise and very readable report that clearly outlines its mission, core themes, and overall dedication to its students and their success.

2. DSU is to be commended for their very thorough and immediate response to Recommendation #1 from the last NWCCU report.

3. DSU is commended for trying to instill their assessment efforts from a standpoint of institutional culture, and not simply another reporting requirement.

Recommendations:

1. The committee recommends DSU continue in its efforts to further clarify and articulate what constitutes mission fulfillment. While the process of assessing its mission has advanced well, it is still not clear from the report exactly how the University will know when mission fulfillment has been achieved. Relatedly, establishing baselines needs to be revisited and possibly re-worded. While establishing baselines are critical, it is not always clear what is expected to occur after their creation. (Standard 1.A.2)