

# *Criterion One*

## **Mission and Integrity**



## Criterion One

*“Northwest College prides itself on a focus on student learning.”*

### **Criterion One: Mission and Integrity**

*Criterion One Statement: Northwest College operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.*

### **Northwest College Prides Itself on**

- A focus on student learning.
- A commitment to diversity and multicultural programming.
- Serving as a cultural hub and model of community enrichment and development.
- Mission documents based on college-wide collaboration.
- Publicizing its mission documents to all constituencies.
- A long history of shared governance.
- The Board of Trustees’ commitment to the success of the College.

### **Northwest College Challenges Itself to**

- Use and evaluate the mission documents more consistently.
- Continue to value and refine shared governance.
- More consistently integrate College Council into shared governance and college leadership.
- Develop a budget process that is more inclusive and transparent.
- Create a system for regular evaluation of college structures, processes, and policies.
- Foster Board of Trustees professional development in terms of policy governance and evaluation methods.

### **Northwest College: Who We Are**

Northwest spent much of 2007–2008 revisiting its mission documents, an extensive process that involved soliciting comments from all campus constituency groups, several committees, and College Council. (Prior to that, the most recent revision took place after the hiring of President LaRowe in 2003.) Although the vision statement remained unchanged, on 9 June 2008, the Northwest College Board of Trustees adopted the following revised mission materials:

### ***Vision Statement***

Through a superior teaching, learning, and living environment, Northwest College will be a dynamic and distinguished educational leader that shapes a positive future for students and the many communities it serves.

### ***Mission Statement***

Through exceptional, dynamic living and learning environments, Northwest College dedicates itself to individual student achievement, diversity, global citizenship, and community vitality.

### ***Enduring Values***

- High expectations
- Purposeful learning
- Social responsibility
- Intellectual curiosity
- Diversity and inclusion
- Community engagement and vitality
- Celebration of accomplishment

### ***Priorities***

- Access
- Support
- Partnerships
- Institutional vitality
- Student achievement
- Communication and image

**CORE COMPONENT—IA:** *Northwest College’s mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization’s commitments.*

Northwest College has statements of mission, vision, enduring values, priorities, and strategic goals that define its mission. (See Appendix 1.1, Mission, Vision, Enduring Values, Priorities, and Strategic Goals.) The mission and vision statements articulate:

- what the College will provide (“exceptional, dynamic living and learning environments”).
- the constituencies for which it provides educational opportunities (“students and the many communities it serves”).

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*“In addition, the mission documents reference individual student achievement in learning and living ...”*

- the purpose of these opportunities (to further “individual student achievement, diversity, global citizenship, and community vitality”).

Northwest’s mission documents include a strong commitment to high academic standards that sustain and advance excellence in higher learning. Supplementing the mission and vision statements are the enduring values, those qualities Northwest College most wishes to preserve in meeting goals and supporting student learning.

The mission documents state goals for the learning to be achieved by students by making reference to “high standards for our students and ourselves.” In addition, the mission documents reference individual student achievement in learning and living (e.g., out-of-class activities and residential life experience), valuing diverse ideas, and providing global perspectives. *The Northwest College Strategic Plan, Academic Years 2008–11* also establishes Northwest’s commitment to

- Increased degree offerings
- Increased numbers of graduates
- Increased retention
- Increased support for developmental studies and at-risk students
- Increased support for workforce development

When appropriate, Northwest revises its mission documents. However, there is no regularly scheduled timeline and process in place for review; rather, the documents tend to reflect changes in leadership and State pressures. It would be helpful to institute a regular schedule of review and revision as an element of the strategic planning process.

To promote awareness of its mission documents among prospective and enrolled students, employees, and the community, the mission documents receive attention through an extensive publicity process. They are prominently displayed in a number of locations, such as *The Catalog*, and are also available through multiple links on the College website, such as

- “Vision and Mission” ([http://www.northwestcollege.edu/info/vision\\_mission.dot](http://www.northwestcollege.edu/info/vision_mission.dot))
- “Human Resources” (<http://www.northwestcollege.edu/jobs/>)
- “President’s Welcome” (<http://www.northwestcollege.edu/info/welcome.dot>)

Reinforcing the importance of these materials, the College has created framed signs that state the mission and vision statements and are placed by the main entrance of many campus buildings and in designated offices and meeting rooms. The strategic goals and priorities are also discussed at every fall in-service all-campus meeting, and the vision statement appears on the back of employee business cards. To further publicize this material, the Office of College Relations

produces a tri-fold brochure, which is designed to publicize the College’s strategic goals and priorities in addition to the mission materials.<sup>1</sup> Each year, the Strategic Plan brochure has a pressrun of 1,500 with copies going to all employees, Student Senators, and some 750 external stakeholders. Copies are placed in the College’s Outreach Centers and libraries and are distributed to service clubs, chambers of commerce, etc. In addition, at the close of every academic year, full-page advertisements are placed in all six service area newspapers and report the year’s accomplishments in relation to annual strategic plans.<sup>2</sup> These strategies help ensure a consistent understanding of the mission and vision among internal and external constituencies.

It should be added that various college units (e.g., Hinckley Library, Student Affairs, College Relations) have developed mission statements that operate within the context of the College’s mission. The presence of these statements helps to fill an organizational need while improving internal communication.

Currently, the Wyoming Community College Commission is creating a strategic plan, which should be finalized in 2010. Northwest recognizes that it may need to revise its mission documents in light of the Commission’s strategic plan.



**CORE COMPONENT—IB:** *In its mission documents, Northwest College recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.*

Powell and the state of Wyoming are rural populations without significant racial diversity. Still, Northwest College is committed to creating a diverse campus and providing students and the community with a range of international and multicultural learning opportunities. Northwest College values diversity and sees it as a college responsibility to the larger community. In its mission documents, Northwest addresses diversity and presents the College’s function in a multicultural society as well as basic strategies for addressing diversity. The mission statement makes explicit reference to “diversity” and “global citizenship.” The College has also embraced an enduring value of “Diversity and inclusion”: “We promote equal access to educational services and programs. We model civility, mutual respect, and appreciation of differences. We offer a welcoming, safe, and inviting campus community and dedicate resources to provide an attractive, collegiate environment that supports learning.” Underscoring this commitment are statements in “The Faculty Employment Policies” of the *Employment Handbook* and the *Student Handbook* that support diversity in thought.



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 1 See Strategic Plan brochures in the Resource Room.  
 2 See Annual Report Advertisements in the Resource Room.

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*“Both the mission statement and the enduring values affirm the College’s commitment to honoring the dignity and worth of individuals.”*

The mission documents provide a basis for basic strategies to address diversity. One of the Strategic Goals of the *The Northwest College Strategic Plan, Academic Years 2008–11* is to “[i]ncrease minority student head-count by 2% per year.” A mission and plan for international student programming is being finalized.

The College has a “Respect for Diversity Statement” that was created by the Diversity Awareness Committee and has been endorsed by College Council and the President’s Advisory Council. This statement reads:

The Northwest College community includes a rich mix of individuals who, through their distinctive viewpoints, personalities, and life experiences, contribute to an intellectually stimulating and supportive culture.

Northwest College’s commitment to diversity is central to understanding and learning through the promotion of free and open inquiry and discussion.

We recognize that our success as an institution depends on an environment where all individuals are included in Northwest College’s community regardless of, but not limited to race, age, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, nationality, citizenship, religious affiliation, ability or disability.

The Diversity Awareness Committee is composed of members from each constituent group in addition to a member of the Student Senate and the Director of Human Resources as well as a number of volunteer members. The Multicultural Subcommittee oversees programming and provides input on other relevant campus issues.

These commitments are further underscored by the College’s dedication to diversity as seen in general education requirements, in the international student program, and in extensive multicultural programming, study-abroad opportunities, and student clubs that support diverse cultures (See Criteria Three and Four for additional discussion).

Both the mission statement and the enduring values affirm the College’s commitment to honoring the dignity and worth of individuals. Northwest’s hiring practices also show the College’s commitment to respecting individuals. Northwest adheres to Title VI, Title IX, Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act in its statement of nondiscrimination as stated in the compliance/non-discrimination statement that prefaces the *Employment Handbook* and involves all aspects of employment, from hiring to termination.<sup>3</sup>

Policies are in place to guide behavior in ways that are consistent with Northwest’s mission and values. Both faculty and students have clearly stated “codes of conduct.” The “Faculty Employment Policies” include the American Association of University Professors’ 1966 (revised in 1987) “Statement on Professional

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<sup>3</sup> See *Employment Handbook* in the Resource Room.

Ethics” as well as extensive written passages on “expected behaviors.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the *Student Handbook* contains statements on “expected behavior” for students as well as faculty.<sup>5</sup> However, it is not evident from any document that the board, administration, professional, or classified staff are governed by any explicitly stated code of conduct.

**CORE COMPONENT—IC:** *Understanding of and support for the mission pervade Northwest College.*

The College’s board, administration, faculty, and staff understand and support the mission, especially given the manner in which so many faculty and staff were involved in the development of the new mission documents. Evidence of campus understanding of and support for the College’s mission can be documented in a number of ways. Two recent examples are Northwest’s revision of its concurrent enrollment program and its decision to open centers in Cody and Worland (See Criterion Five).

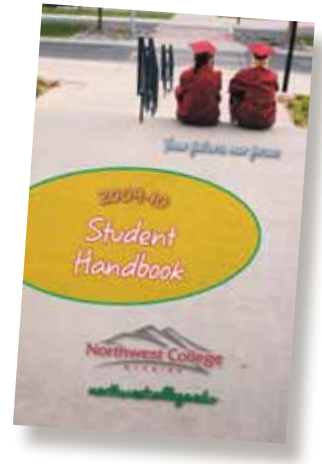
The goals of administrative and academic subunits are congruent with the College’s mission. Actions taken by the College to address priorities and targets in *The Northwest College Strategic Plan, Academic Years 2008–11* are documented in actions taken by individual administrative areas. Further evidence may be found in the curriculum development and approval process, the strategic planning and budgeting processes, and the assessment process.

**CORE COMPONENT—ID:** *The organization’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.*

Northwest College has a long history of shared governance that has shaped the character of the institution and has been reinforced by the extensive council and committee structure. Two groups play a central role: The President’s Advisory Council and College Council.

***President’s Advisory Council***

This group is comprised of the area vice presidents (Academic Affairs, Administrative Services, College Relations, and Student Affairs) and meets to advise the President on important campus issues. Guests with expertise in a specific area are often invited to make presentations. The Council meets every Monday.



4 See *Employment Handbook* in the Resource Room.

5 See *Student Handbook* in the Resource Room.

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*“Northwest College has a long history of shared governance that has shaped the character of the institution ...”*

### *College Council*

Launched in May 1992, this group is comprised of representatives elected by constituent groups. The Council’s function is to advise, provide input, and submit recommendations to the President and, through the President, to the Board of Trustees. College Council hears concerns raised by College administrators, standing committees, *ad hoc* committees, or any member of the college community via Council representatives. College Council representatives are also responsible for communicating to their constituencies’ concerns, points of view, ideas, and recommendations regarding items submitted for discussion to College Council. It is expected that all major policy and budgetary decisions will be presented to College Council for review and discussion prior to implementation. College Council meets at least monthly throughout the calendar year. Membership includes the following:

- Administrative Staff—1 member
- Classified Staff—2 members
- Faculty—4 members
- Professional Staff—2 members
- Student Senate—2 members
- Director of Human Resources—*ex officio*
- College President—*ex officio*

Although College Council is effective in terms of providing a forum for all parts of campus, its effectiveness tends to vary from president to president and chair to chair rather than from an established place in the governance structure.

Other important groups include the Academic Advisory Council, the Enrollment Management Committee, and the Integrated Communications Committee. Although many other decisions are generated from and reviewed by other committees before reaching either the President’s Advisory Council or College Council, one or more of these councils is involved with most significant campus-wide decisions.

Comprised of seven members elected for four-year terms, the Board of Trustees geographically represents and is elected from the tax district, Park County. The Trustees themselves elect officers (President, Vice President/Secretary, Treasurer).



- **Jim Vogt, Board President**

NWC has been part of Jim Vogt's life since 1967 when he became Student Center Director and taught math. A strong advocate for students and employees, his service continued after his 1997 retirement when he was elected as Trustee in 2002 and later led the state's trustee association. Jim and his wife, Judy, have four grown children who are NWC alumni.



- **Mark Westerhold, Board Vice President/Secretary**

Currently Senior Vice President at Pinnacle Bank in Cody, Wyo., Mark Westerhold brings 30 years of business and banking experience to his position as a trustee. An alumnus who had a great experience at NWC, two of his children also attended Northwest. He believes NWC provides excellent educational opportunities and is a wonderful asset to the area.



- **Carolyn Danko, Board Treasurer**

Carolyn Danko came to Powell in 1969 when her husband began teaching at Northwest. After retiring from four decades of public school teaching, she remained involved in education by seeking a Board seat. She's attended the University of North Dakota and Kansas State University, and holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Wyoming.



- **Martha (Marty) Coe, Trustee**

Raised in Laramie, Wyo., Cody realtor Marty Coe received a bachelor of arts degree at the University of Wyoming. She's worked for the Cody Medical Foundation and earned a real estate license in 1990. Believing in giving back to her community, she's served on many local boards. She enjoys playing with her seven grandchildren, biking, hiking, horseback riding, and camp cooking.



- **Gloria Hedderman, Trustee**

Gloria Frisby Hedderman is a real estate broker with offices in Powell and Cody. Her firm serves the entire Big Horn Basin. A Park County native, Gloria has enjoyed her long association with Northwest College, including occasional student, employee, Foundation Director, and now trustee. She and her husband, Larry, have two grown daughters.



- **John Housel, Trustee**

With a long and varied legal career, Cody native John Housel is a devout proponent of higher learning. He is a strong advocate for greater presence of NWC in Cody and for increased enrollment of Cody students. He is an outdoor enthusiast with interests in civic betterment, history, geology, and Shakespeare. He and his wife, Linda, have two children.



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- **Jim Sessions, Trustee**

Jim Sessions is a videographer/hunter for an outdoor TV/video company focusing on self-guided hunts and over-the-shoulder videography. A Northwest College alumnus, Jim has worked in the parks and recreation field and earned a bachelor of science degree in that area at the University of Wyoming. Jim and his wife, Lynn, and family reside near Meeteetse.

The board meets on the second Monday of each month and is regulated by state open meeting laws. Meetings are covered by the local media, and minutes are available online via the College's website (<http://www.northwestcollege.edu/intranet/minutes/bot/>).<sup>6</sup> Board members do not receive compensation; however, they are reimbursed for reasonable expenses. As part of its duties, the Board of Trustees

- Reviews and approves the College's annual strategic plan and mission documents.
- Hires the College President and evaluates him/her based on attainment of targets and priorities in the Strategic Plan.
- Provides fiscal oversight.
- Considers policy decisions.
- Approves the annual budget.

The Board's policies and practices document its focus on Northwest's mission. The Board of Trustees operates under *Rules and Regulations Pertaining to the Governance of the Northwest College Board of Trustees*.<sup>7</sup> According to the *Rules and Regulations*, Chapter I, Section 6, "The objective of the Northwest College Board of Trustees shall be to assure that the College accomplishes its vision and mission."

The College administration provides the Board of Trustees with an internal orientation to the College. Through the use of work sessions that provide an education of the departments and divisions of the College as well as insight into special topics, the Board of Trustees learns how all areas of the College operate. Over the past few years, most board members have attended at least one major national or regional conference including the National Legislative Summit (NLS); the Wyoming Association of Community College Trustees Conference (WACCT); and the American Association of Community Colleges Leadership Conference (AACC). The Board also has a yearly self-evaluation process. However, there are questions surrounding both the effectiveness and transparency of this process, which receives input exclusively from Board members, lacks any form of narrative or self-assessment, and is not distributed to the public.<sup>8</sup>

6 See Board of Trustees Minutes in the Resource Room.

7 See *Rules and Regulations Pertaining to the Governance of the Northwest College Board of Trustees* in the Resource Room.

8 See Board of Trustees Self-Assessments in the Resource Room.

The Board's *Rules and Regulation* (Chapter VII) defines the board's role as a policy-making body and distinguishes between policy making and the development of "organizational procedures for the implementation and interpretation of policy," which is assigned to the President. In addition, the Board's *Rules and Regulations* (Chapter IV) includes a "Board Code of Ethics" statement that the "primary function of the board is to establish the policies by which the community college is to be administered."

The Board's *Rules and Regulations* (Chapter IX) further outlines the College President's duties as having "authority and responsibility for the (well-being) of college finances, records, buildings, grounds, personnel, students, business, support services, and instructional activities." Additional regulations include the following:

- **Chapter VII, Section 2, "College Procedures":** "The College President has the responsibility for developing organizational procedures for the implementation and interpretation of policy. The College President will utilize personnel and College committees for such actions. The Board may advise if needed."
- **Chapter IX, Section 1, "Authority":** "The Northwest College President is appointed by the College Board and is directly responsible to the Board. The College President is the chief executive officer of the institution. The Board evaluates the President, acknowledges the President's recommendations, while providing resources to the President to complete the respective duties."
- **Chapter IX, Section 2, "Duties":** "The President is responsible for the completion of duties relating to Wyoming statutes, these Rules and Regulations, College policies, and procedures. The President has authority and responsibility for the (well-being) of College finances, records, buildings, grounds, personnel, students, business, support services, and instructional activities."

In the past, there have been allegations of Board micromanagement, a point underscored in the 2001 report from the North Central visiting team. Since then, more Board members have participated in professional development opportunities to support board education regarding policy governance and successful college operations.

In 2007, there were allegations about improper Board meetings: The Board of Trustees was criticized by some employees for its spring 2007 discussions—said by some employees to have violated the Wyoming Open Meetings Law—prior to a board decision to change coaches from faculty to professional staff contracts. While the issue was finally laid aside, concern lingers among some employees about how the Board gathers information and makes some decisions. The



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minutes of the 8 June 2007 special retreat of the Board with employee group representatives indicate the commitment of the Board and Northwest College to shared governance and articulate expectations of that commitment, as do minutes of subsequent similar meetings as well as specific constituent group reports on these events.<sup>9</sup> Thus began a series of quarterly meetings between Board members and constituency group representatives with discussion topics such as the compensation study and College budget process, decision-making patterns, and the planning process. The President and Vice Presidents have not been included in these meetings, raising questions of Board intrusion into College operations and an undermining of Board policy governance.

Northwest College works to ensure that the distribution of responsibilities as defined in governance structures, processes, and activities are understood and implemented through delegated authority. However, the evolution of this process has been uneven. Prior to 1997, governance materials were primarily communicated via handbooks. Each constituency group had its own handbook outlining that group’s responsibilities in the governance system in addition to housing relevant policies and procedures materials. In 1997, the Dean of Administrative Services initiated creation of the *Institutional Handbook*, a repository for policy documents common to all employee constituencies. President Miles LaRowe oversaw the transformation of the *Institutional Handbook* into the *Employee Handbook*, an expanded collection of new policies and procedures. At that point, only *The Faculty Handbook* continued to exist as a separate entity; *The Classified Staff Handbook* and *The Professional Staff Handbook* had already been dismantled. The faculty was uncertain of their relationship to these handbooks and continued to see *The Faculty Handbook* as their chief governance document.

In 2007–2008, the Board initiated a major revision of *The Faculty Handbook*, ultimately resulting in the inclusion of sections of *The Faculty Handbook* in the *Employment Handbook*. Some argued that this revision and consolidation was another example of Board micromanagement and led to a decrease in the status of faculty as campus and governance leaders in favor of a legal text that articulates how faculty should do their job, failing to convey a full picture of the holistic life of a Northwest College faculty member. In addition, the *Employment Handbook* omitted most governance materials (e.g., committee selection and membership materials). Also problematic was that fact that constituency group bylaws and College Council bylaws did not exist in a publicly accessible form or any official documents. To address this problem, in the summer of 2009, the President’s Advisory Council drafted *The Governance Handbook*, which it is currently revising.

Currently, the *Student Handbook* receives attention from two groups. The first group considers academic sections of the *Student Handbook*. For policy changes, the Student Handbook (Non-Academic) Committee reviews non-academic student handbook policies and procedures and makes recommendations for newly suggested and existing substantive policy changes, additions, or deletions to the

9 See Board of Trustees Minutes, 8 June 2007, in the Resource Room.

Vice President for Student Affairs. In 2009–2010, the College decided not to print the *Student Handbook* in favor of placing the document online.<sup>10</sup> Students were given a card directing them to the online version of the *Student Handbook*.

People within the governance and administrative structures are committed to the mission and appropriately qualified to carry out their defined responsibilities. The mission statement as well as the strategic plan with its priorities and strategic goals are drafted by a combination of administrative personnel, faculty, staff, and students and then reviewed and approved by the Board. The process for creating and revising job descriptions as well as the hiring process as defined in writing through the *Employment Handbook* assists in ensuring that those in the administrative structure are qualified to carry out their defined responsibilities. In addition, the College *Catalog* highlights academic credentials of administrators and faculty.

Faculty and other academic leaders share responsibility for the coherence of the curriculum and the integrity of academic processes. Course content is developed, reviewed, and approved by faculty. Each division holds monthly meetings during the academic year in which curricular and campus issues are discussed. Formal course approval starts with programs, followed by divisions, and then moves to the faculty-led Curriculum Committee with the Dean of Student Learning and Academic Support and the Vice President for Academic Affairs working with faculty on changes. Final decisions on new programs are approved by the President and the Board and then ultimately by the Wyoming Community College Commission.

In 2007, the Board of Trustees inserted itself into the curriculum approval process, assigning itself the role of approving new degree and certificate programs before these proposals are sent for review by the three-tier, state-wide community college program approval process (Wyoming Academic Vice Presidents' Academic Affairs Council, the Executive Council, and the Wyoming Community College Commission). While potentially raising governance issues in relation to faculty-led curriculum development, this new role of the Board is consistent with procedures at a number of Wyoming community colleges. Procedurally, this change has resulted in positive discussions, only small delays in program approvals, and no over-riding of faculty program decisions. (See Criterion Three for a discussion of faculty involvement in curricular development and academic assessment.)

Northwest works to have effective communication to facilitate governance processes and activities, using a variety of methods:

- Campuswide e-mail messages, delivered as necessary by Vice Presidents and middle managers, provide information on updates, developments, employee accomplishments, etc.
- *Presidential Updates* are sent via e-mail to all employees and Student Senators.



10 See <http://www.northwestcollege.edu/students/handbook/> for the online version of the *Student Handbook*.

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*“It was also noted that communication often breaks down on the way up with particular questions about when a pending decision should first go to College Council or the President’s Advisory Council.”*

- The President hosts pre-board meetings among all constituent group Presidents.
- Regular updates are provided by the President and Vice Presidents at College Council meetings.
- The President gives formal updates on major developments at twice-a-year in-service meetings attended by all employees.
- Agendas and post-meeting summaries from the President’s Advisory Council meetings are sent to all employees via e-mail.
- Vice Presidents hold regular (some meet weekly) meetings with their staff to review, discuss, and answer questions on major topics/actions in President’s Advisory Council meetings.
- Major student performances in regional and national competitions are highlighted in the “Spotlight” section of the website’s home page.
- Beginning in Fall 2009, yammer.com is being used as a voluntary employee forum to facilitate informal communication. The E-forum is also in response to *The Northwest College Strategic Plan, Academic Years 2008–11* strategic goal of “[d]evelop[ing] a new initiative to improve internal communication.”

Surveys of employees conducted in 2008 and 2009 continued to include observations that poor communication has been and continues to be a problem: The perception is that communication does not occur fast enough and that leaders do not share common understandings of decisions made. It was also noted that communication often breaks down on the way up with particular questions about when a pending decision should first go to College Council or the President’s Advisory Council.<sup>11</sup>

President Prestwich’s e-mail “updates” have been helpful in terms of communicating major budgetary updates and answering questions. During the FY10 budget cuts made during 2008–2009, President Prestwich communicated through memos with the campus, explaining the process and proposed cuts. He also submitted proposed cuts to College Council at a special meeting in April 2008. Given increasingly uncertain budget changes, the need for college-wide communication and involvement of College Council for collaborative problem solving will be essential.

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<sup>11</sup> See Governance Surveys in the Resource Room.

**CORE COMPONENT—IE:** *Northwest College upholds and protects its integrity.*

During the 2009–2010 academic year, a number of administrative decisions and actions resulted in a variety of on- and off-campus reactions that reverberated for months. Perceptions about these cases and varying interpretations of the implications of these decisions were shared on campus, in the media, and in the community. The set of decisions and actions included the following:

- The dismissal of a long-term and well liked professional staff member.
- The potential dismissal of a senior tenured faculty member.
- A contract non-renewal after the second year of the untenured faculty member who oversaw the print journalism program and college newspaper, *The Northwest Trail*.
- A contract non-renewal of a multi-year adjunct faculty member in art.
- A college recruiting letter sent to students of a single religion from the President with an attached recruiting letter from a local religious leader.
- An anonymous “climate survey” was sent via campus e-mail with the approval of the Vice President for Administrative Services in which employees identified themselves as the “Peace Movement” and questioned the actions of faculty and staff, characterizing them as “threatening.”

Although the administration argued it had followed policy, many campus employees saw these decisions as violating core principles of shared governance. These situations led to significant campus tension. To address this, in March 2010, all constituent group representatives met with the Board of Trustees, and the decision was made to bring a mediator to campus. The President’s Advisory Council selected a mediator, whose name was announced in late April with mediation beginning in the summer of 2010 and continuing into the fall.

Northwest works to ensure that its activities are congruent with the mission. There are many positive examples of providing students with “exceptional, dynamic living and learning environments”:

- Analysis of capstone courses and their outcomes continues to document overall student success in terms of the all-college outcomes.
- Monthly reports of the vice presidents to the Board document academic and non-academic activities by faculty, staff, and students.

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*“The Board exercises its responsibility to the public to ensure that the College operates legally, responsibly, and with fiscal honesty.”*

- Faculty evaluations and the Rank and Tenure Committee decisions document quality of instruction/teaching.
- The Enrollment Advisory Committee/Retention Subcommittee and Title III grant document retention, engagement, and advising plans and their assessments.
- The Office of Residence and Campus Life conducts regular assessments and uses this information for planning.
- The Institutional Effectiveness Committee considers assessment data as a means for improving student learning.

The Board exercises its responsibility to the public to ensure that the College operates legally, responsibly, and with fiscal honesty. The Board’s *Rules and Regulations Pertaining to the Governance of the Northwest College Board of Trustees* (Chapter IX) outline the College President’s duties as having “authority and responsibility for the (well-being) of college finances, records, buildings, grounds, personnel, students, business, support services, and instructional activities.” The College employs a Finance Director who is a Certified Public Accountant and is continually re-evaluating internal controls and accounting procedures to meet the Board’s and College’s fiscal responsibilities. The College has also hired an auditing firm with higher education experience to conduct independent financial audits in compliance with state and federal rules. The firm conducts audits to assess if the College is conforming to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and that their statements are fairly stated, meet federal requirements, and provide effective internal controls. Since 2007, the College has had no material findings. The Wyoming Community College Commission examines audits every year to verify financial compliance.

The College understands and abides by local, state, and federal laws and regulations applicable to it. Northwest works within a coordinating framework established by the Wyoming State Legislature by which the Wyoming Community College Commission monitors compliance with specific laws and agency regulations.<sup>12</sup> The College also adheres to a bid process.

Other compliance efforts include but are not limited to the following examples:

- Audits prove financial compliance of the College and federal grants.
- An appeals process is followed through set procedures.
- External grant evaluators monitor compliance.
- Athletic regulations are followed in terms of eligibility and scholarships.

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<sup>12</sup> See *Wyoming Community College Rules and Regulations* in the Resource Room.



- Visa regulations are enforced for regulating international students, faculty, and staff.
- The Compensation Study conducted in 2007 focused to a significant degree on compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act.
- The Employment Policy Review Committee works to ensure compliance in employment policy and practices with federal, state, and local laws or regulations and recommends measures to the President's Advisory Council.
- The College has a Compliance Officer (the Vice President for Administrative Services), a Grievance Officer for faculty and staff complaints, and a Student Grievance Officer for student complaints.
- The College complies with EEO regulations in its implementation of search processes.<sup>13</sup>
- The College protects students' privacy by adhering to FERPA laws.
- Personnel records are kept consistently and meet legal requirements.



The College works to implement consistently clear and fair policies regarding the rights and responsibilities of each of its internal constituencies. A new College Grievance Policy has been adopted at the recommendation of the College attorney, and it will require time and practice to determine its effectiveness.<sup>14</sup> The Grievance Policy should, along with other policies, be reviewed and perhaps revised based on available evidence. The objectivity of the Grievance Officer was questioned following the revelation of her participation in the Peace Movement, and the faculty filed a class-action grievance with the President who ultimately determined that he would appoint an independent grievance officer for anyone filing a grievance who did not believe he or she would get a fair hearing.

Leadership at the highest levels needs to engage and sustain dialogue with employee constituency groups to accomplish greater communication, improved morale, and better decision making. Committees serve an important, ongoing shared leadership role; however, more attention must be given to decision-making models in the cases of budget priorities, the compensation system, long-range planning, reductions in force, and more intense problem-solving matters.

The College's structures and processes allow it to ensure the integrity of its co-curricular and auxiliary activities. Funding is specifically allocated to support

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13 See *Employment Handbook* in the Resource Room.

14 See *Employment Handbook* in the Resource Room.

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*“The College employs a fair, open process for allowing the public access to its facilities and has changed its system for reserving rooms to enhance public access.”*

these activities. Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities are provided for within the College’s organizational structure and are supported with faculty and staff as stated in applicable job descriptions and with adequate budgets and reassigned time for faculty and staff. Examples include but are not limited to the following:

- An “Athletic Code of Conduct” was developed by coaches and staff and then approved by the Board. Teams operate according to NJCAA and NIRA rules.
- The bylaws of the Booster Club have been revised, and there is better monitoring of its activities and fiscal profile. (This was listed as a concern in North Central’s 2001 assessment.)
- The Livestock and Equine Judging teams compete in national competitions regulated by oversight bodies such as the National Horse Judging Team Coaches Association.
- The Forensics team uses the American Forensics Association Code of Ethics.
- The Music program is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music Accreditation.
- The Nursing program is approved by a state board of nursing and the National League for Nursing.

Northwest deals fairly with its external constituents. Examples include but are not limited to the following:

- The College employs a fair, open process for allowing the public access to its facilities and has changed its system for reserving rooms to enhance public access. Currently, Northwest is tracking that procedure to assess its effectiveness.
- The College has cooperative relations with its landlords in the case of facilities leased in both Cody and Worland.
- Northwest College adheres to a “Purchasing Policy” approved on 13 July 1982 that is based on state statutes and describes the bid process.
- Northwest honors contracts with all vendors and pays bills promptly.
- The DeWitt Student Center has a designated place for the community to share non-college information with the campus (e.g., Gideons, military recruiters, etc.).

According to a five-year plan, community surveys are conducted annually in service-area communities to determine attitudes and perceptions that exist

among residents. Major governance events, including meetings of the Board and College Council, are open to the media and public. (See Criterion Five for a discussion of the College's relationship to its external communities.)

Northwest College presents itself accurately and honestly to the public. Communications professionals in the College Relations Office have contributed to the College's positive track record in this area. Their philosophy of positive public relations has aided communications with the public and has promoted accountability and transparency to both internal and external audiences. The College also regularly seeks media input on how news release and dissemination practices can be improved. The College utilizes a range of vehicles to promote accurate and honest communications to the public, including

- **Annual report advertisements** in each of the College's service area newspapers highlight accomplishments of Strategic Plan priorities and major developments.
- **The annually updated Institutional Fact Card**, which include key facts about NWC, are provided to all employees and to the Student Senate, and are mailed to several hundred external stakeholders.
- **Strategic Plan brochures**, which include Northwest's mission documents, are provided to all employees and to the Student Senate, and are mailed to several hundred external stakeholders.
- **The Northwest Alumni News** is the official publication of the NWC Alumni Association; it's provided to all employees and to the Student Senate, and bulk mailed to nearly 15,000 alumni and donors.
- **The Public Events Calendar** is printed and mailed to a subscriber list of about 2,000 individuals in the college's service area.
- **Publications** ensure the accuracy of assertions and facts; College Relations Office staff work directly with campus clients in a system which provides appropriate proofreading and authorization.
- **Paid media advertising** ensures the accuracy of assertions and facts; College Relations Office staff work directly with campus clients in a system which provides appropriate proofreading and authorization.
- **News releases and biographical files** ensure the accuracy of assertions and facts; College Relations Office staff work directly with campus clients in a system which provides appropriate proofreading and authorization. While most news releases are



## Criterion One

primarily promotional, serving either to announce upcoming events and employee/student successes or provide informational updates, occasionally controversial and/or “hard” news items (e.g., Board of Trustees meeting actions, budget cuts, reduction in force, and presidential searches) are also covered in news releases. Alphabetized biographical files housed in the College Relations Office provide access to information which helps ensure accuracy and thoroughness in communicating with both internal and external audiences.



- **Radio talk show appearances** allow employees and students to participate in talk shows on area radio stations and are assisted in doing so.
- **The College website** provides an essential communication tool. Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of assertions and facts on the “central” website; a content management system—new to the campus since August 2008—gives individual “website monitors” the ability to update content in their area. Major news, e.g., presidential searches and a 2004 residence hall fire, is shared by creating microsites that are accessible 24/7.
- **Crisis communication** takes several forms. The College’s *Crisis Communication Plan*, which includes clear communication steps to be followed during a crisis, promotes full, accurate, honest and timely communication. The plan’s primary content areas are: its purpose, definitions, a public relations policy statement, communication policies, the Crisis Communication Team, and procedures (activation of the team, information collection, Web presence development, notification of media and stakeholders, team and media resources rooms, and a post-crisis audit).
- **Public presentations** allow college personnel respond accurately and honestly to a variety of questions about the college in various public settings including chambers of commerce and service club meetings.
- **NWC Foundation’s *Annual Report*** includes clear, honest, accurate presentations of the NWC Foundation’s successes and financial position.



Northwest documents timely response to complaints and grievances, particularly those of students. The *Student Handbook* and the *Employment Handbook* clarify the grievance process for students. Students who bring concerns forward to the administration are mentored about the complaint and appeal processes. Grievances are governed by a calendar that ensures a timely response.

## Final Thoughts and Future Plans

All parts of Northwest College work to meet the mission statement as part of the institution's continuing commitment to improvement, student learning, and community engagement. Very importantly as well, in view of recent controversies involving policies and actions covered in the local and national media, it appears that Northwest College again has an opportunity to address challenges already enumerated at the outset of this report. To address these challenges, the Board of Trustees and College have

- hired an outside individual to act in the role of a mediator and to meet with the Board, all College constituency groups and a committee consisting of elected constituency group representatives. The Board and the College are then committed to act on the recommendations made by this individual.
- committed to the continuation of meetings between the Board and constituency group representatives.
- committed to finishing the revision of *The Governance Handbook* and in Fall 2010 start the process of getting input from the various standing committees and College Council, so *The Handbook* can be published and distributed to the campus.



