

Overview

Northwest College: An Overview



Overview

Northwest College: Who We Are

On 30 March 2004, a fire broke out in a second-floor residential room of Bridger Hall, one of Northwest's oldest residence halls. Fire departments from Powell, Cody, Lovell, and Deaver-Frannie responded. All [120] students living in Bridger Hall were evacuated safely, and as a safety precaution, [44] residents of nearby Colter Hall were also evacuated for one night. Students displaced by the fire were assigned alternative residential housing on campus through the end of the semester. An unprecedented outpouring of community support raised over \$66,000 in cash, chamber bucks, local coupons, and more for the Bridger Hall residents. The cause of the fire was determined by a Wyoming Fire Marshal to be an accidental failure of an electric device in a student's room.¹

Taken from the Northwest College website, this account is factually accurate, but it doesn't tell the whole story. In the face of this disaster, the College and the area communities immediately came together. As Residence and Campus Life Director Dee Havig remembers, "I think every employee and almost every student that was on the campus jumped in (to help). People even putting their backpacks down, saying, 'What can I do to help?' The campus—everything just shut down. Everybody was out helping. It's a pretty warm feeling when you see that."²

For example, the Trapper Gym was opened to provide temporary housing while the College made available emergency support and counseling; students who had single-occupancy rooms in the residence halls agreed to take a roommate for the rest of the semester; *The Northwest Trail* student newspaper produced a special edition and covered the fire extensively, and the College website provided up-to-date information; the bookstore and Hinckley Library made textbooks available while faculty provided class accommodations for students affected by the fire; faculty and staff volunteered their time to help students—including organizing a garage sale to raise funds. Local area businesses and community members made generous donations of money, food, linen, clothing, hygiene supplies, and even opened their homes.

"The community spirit here, just how tight-knit of a community this is, just amazed me," Jeremy Johnston, Associate Professor of History and then Faculty Organization President, recalls. "People came forward and raised money to help students get back on their feet, clothing them, in some cases, just taking them in. That night, I don't think anybody stayed in the gym. They all found somebody to stay with, on campus or off. It just really demonstrated to me how the campus could come together as a team—helping students, caring for their needs, cleaning up."³

Ultimately, the Bridger Hall fire became a catalyst for change. At the next legislative session, the State funded the installation of sprinkler systems in all residence halls

"In the face of this disaster, the College and the area communities immediately came together."

-
- 1 See "College History: 2000s" in the Resource Room.
 - 2 See Ilene Olson's "More Memories of the Bridger Hall Fire—And the Relief Effort that Brought a Community Together," *Powell Tribune blog* in the Resource Room.
 - 3 See Ilene Olson's "More Memories of the Bridger Hall Fire—And the Relief Effort that Brought a Community Together," *Powell Tribune blog* in the Resource Room.

in the State of Wyoming. The proceeds from a \$4.1 million Bridger Hall insurance settlement were used to build Phase I of the 80-bed Simpson Hall, named in honor of former US Senator Alan Simpson and his wife, Ann. The new building introduced suite-style residence options to the campus. Ultimately, Northwest took what could have been a disaster and through hard work turned it into an opportunity for growth.

In many ways, Northwest College, a comprehensive community college located in Powell, Wyoming, isn't a typical two-year college. Student learning is supported by

- **a vibrant community** with a collegiate atmosphere that includes extensive co-curricular and extra-curricular activities on and off campus with clubs, classes, and travel opportunities usually available only at universities or private institutions.
- **a commitment to general education** that provides students with a basis for life-long learning.
- **an emphasis on transfer.** According to 2008–2009 Wyoming Community College Commission data, approximately 70% of Northwest's students are in transfer ("academic") programs while 24% are in occupational programs. This academic program figure is the highest in the State. (Casper College is second with 43% of students in transfer programs.)
- **a sizable residential population and residential life program** that provides students choosing to live on campus with a number of options. Based on Fall 2009 enrollment data, of the 2,198 students enrolled in classes, 743 chose to live on-campus with 658 in the residence halls and 85 in apartments. More students live on campus at Northwest than at any other Wyoming or Montana community college.
- **a commitment to diversity** through a multinational student body, significant multicultural programming, travel-abroad opportunities, and a small but fast-growing minority population.
- **engagement with a largely full-time faculty in and outside of the classroom.** As reported in Fall 2009 statistics, the student-to-faculty ratio is 20:1.
- **an expanding culture of evidence and student learning outcomes assessment.** Northwest's assessment program is multilayered, interactive, and faculty-led.
- **a tradition of broad-based shared governance** that values multiple perspectives on problem solving, college priorities, and faculty leadership of academics. Since the mid-1960s, shared governance has been a defining characteristic of Northwest College.



Overview

“Northwest Community College came into existence in 1953 when a community college district was formed in Powell and the Center became autonomous.”

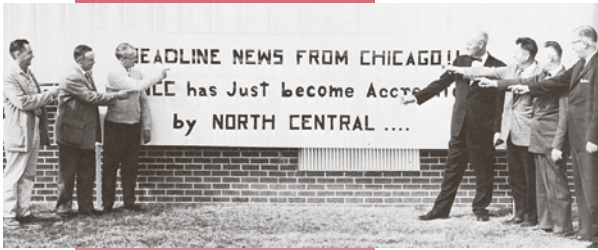
- **a commitment to access that utilizes a sizeable physical plant and dedicated educational space.** In addition to the main campus in Powell, the College has two centers in outlying communities in addition to growing concurrent and dual enrollment programs as well as service area-wide ABE/GED and workforce programs.
- **a supportive, rural service area** that covers a three-county area roughly the size of Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Northwest College Background and Demographics

On 10 September 1946, the University of Wyoming Northwest Center (UWNWC) opened in Powell, a rural community located some 75 miles from the East Entrance to Yellowstone National Park. UWNWC was the University of Wyoming’s first “satellite center,” established as a two-year, fully accredited branch of the University, which was responsible for conducting annual evaluation visits. Northwest Community College came into existence in 1953 when a community college district was formed in Powell and the Center became autonomous.

On 9 April 1964, Northwest Community College received full independent accreditation from the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges. The name changed to “Northwest College” in 1989. Today, Northwest is one of seven Wyoming community colleges, each with independent boards and transfer courses articulated with the University of Wyoming.

Today, Powell is a community of about 5,400 supported by an economy primarily based upon irrigated farming, ranching, tourism, oil, and agricultural support services. The Powell campus encompasses 124 total acres with 57 buildings, the second largest physical plant in the State. Northwest serves three counties:



- **Park County** (tax district with 6,942 square miles, 27,976 residents, 4.0 persons per square mile);
- **Big Horn County** (3,137 square miles, 11,581 residents, 3.7 persons per square mile); and
- **Washakie County** (2,240 square miles, 7,911 residents, 3.5 persons per square mile).

Additionally, the College supports the Mickelson Field Station (50 miles west of Powell) and learning centers in Cody (25 miles southwest of Powell) and Worland (90 miles south of Powell).

Associate degrees, workforce trainings, adult basic education, and student support services are available at all three physical locations. Through a BOCES agreement in Powell, the Powell campus also partners on the delivery of a diverse community education program.

Table 0.1 provides a more comprehensive view of Northwest’s demographics based on end-of-year reports provided by the Wyoming Community College Commission.

Table 0.1
Northwest College Fall Enrollment Summary, 2001–2009

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
UNDUPLICATED HEADCOUNT	1,576	1,626	1,689	1,755	1,754	1,763	1,747	1,810	2,198
FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE)	1631.3	1636.3	1704.3	1772.0	1710.0	1793.1	1796.9	1791.8	2090.2
GENDER									
Male	599	591	662	644	654	718	687	675	905
Female	977	1,035	1,027	1,111	1,100	1,045	1,060	1,135	1,293
ETHNICITY									
Black, Non-Hispanic	6	8	8	5	9	10	14	11	13
American Indian/Alaskan	20	17	12	13	21	17	18	19	32
Asian/Pacific Islander	11	18	20	19	30	31	45	84	61
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<i>New category in 2009–10</i>								5
Hispanic	41	69	58	83	79	90	84	100	141
White, Non-Hispanic	1,483	1,504	1,584	1,628	1,606	1,609	1,581	1,591	1,868
Two or More Race, Non-Hispanic	<i>New category in 2009–10</i>								47
Non-Resident Alien	15	10	7	1	1	0	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	0	6	8	6	5	5	31
FULL-TIME/PART-TIME									
Full-time	1,067	1,039	1,120	1,176	1,129	1,170	1,172	1,158	1,348
Part-time	509	587	569	579	625	593	575	652	850
AGE									
Under 17	3	12	4	15	13	23	13	12	46
17–24	1,017	985	1,091	1,187	1,140	1,200	1,199	1,173	1,360
25–29	131	144	153	137	144	164	159	154	233
30–34	88	122	115	90	96	93	112	139	161
35–39	93	81	78	78	84	81	75	110	118
40–49	137	144	144	145	141	116	106	112	139
50–59	70	91	72	79	102	59	56	77	91
60 and over	25	37	22	24	30	26	26	33	45
Unknown	12	10	10	0	4	1	1	0	5
Average Age	<i>Began tracking in 2005–06</i>				27.16	25.69	25.61	26.53	26.47
Male	–	–	–	–	25.61	23.94	24.23	24.87	24.56
Female	–	–	–	–	28.09	26.89	26.50	27.52	27.81
Full-time	–	–	–	–	22.80	22.42	22.55	23.04	23.27
Part-time	–	–	–	–	35.10	32.15	31.85	32.74	31.57
RESIDENCY									
Service Area Residents	979	1,056	1,087	1,128	1,114	1,096	1,055	1,101	1,416
Big Horn County	226	272	279	271	287	283	241	235	331
Park County	658	670	703	751	728	717	745	779	949
Washakie County	95	114	105	106	99	96	69	87	136
All Wyoming Residents	1,132	1,209	1,280	1,306	1,278	1,251	1,213	1,260	1,603
Non-Residents	444	417	409	449	476	512	534	549	595
Unspecified	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Source: Enrollment Reports submitted to the Wyoming Community College Commission

IR: 4/15/2010

Overview

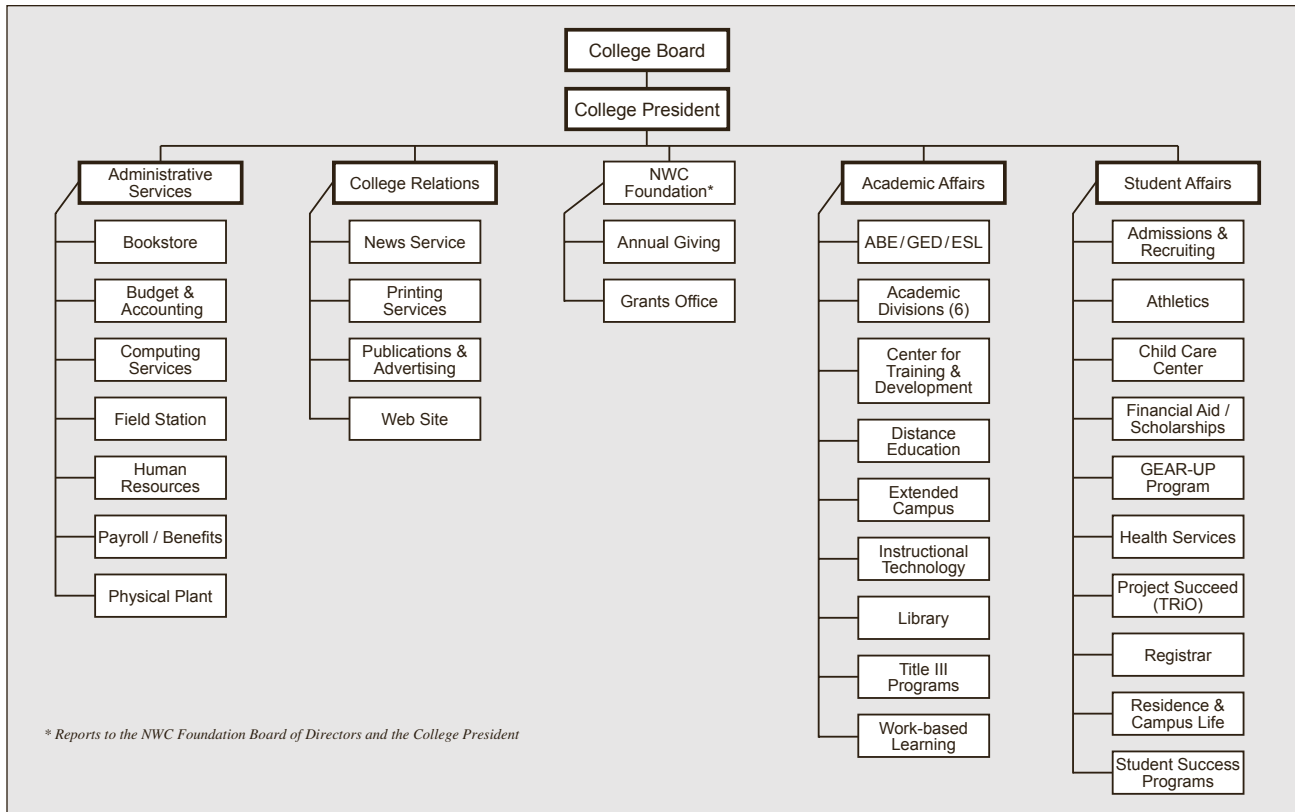
“Within the full-time faculty, 35% hold doctorates or terminal degrees (the national community college average is about 15%).”

Northwest is an open-access college that accepts any student with a Wyoming high school diploma or GED certification. The annual cost for a Wyoming resident living on campus is approximately \$9,851.00. The State provides merit-based scholarships to Wyoming high school graduates. Approximately 44% of Northwest College students receive scholarships with 81% of those awards institutionally funded and 19% funded through private Foundation scholarships. The average scholarship amount awarded per student is \$2,389.00. Because of its extremely low tuition and fees, Northwest is easily accessed by students from almost any economic situation.

Northwest offers 56 transfer degrees (Associate of Arts and Associate of Science), 20 technical degrees (Associate of Applied Science), and 34 skills certificates. Graduate numbers are divided between transfer (roughly 60%) and career degrees (roughly 40%).

There are 314 employees at Northwest. Of those, 152 are faculty with 80 working full-time. Within the full-time faculty, 35% hold doctorates or terminal degrees (the national community college average is about 15%). The College also employs 162 administrative, professional, and classified staff. The College’s organizational structure is seen in Figure 0.1, “Northwest College Organizational Chart.”

Figure 0.1
Northwest College Organizational Chart



Because of the work of students and faculty, the College has a significant cultural impact on the community, offering over 100 programs every year on a wide range of subjects: musical concerts, art exhibits, sporting events, readings and presentations, science fairs, agriculture expositions, welding contests, television and webcasts—the list goes on. Contributing to community vitality is part of the College’s mission.

The College has been fortunate that Wyoming’s mineral-based economy has produced increased state revenue in recent years. As a point of comparison, in FY 2001, the College had revenues totaling \$16,404,358; that amount had almost doubled by FY 2009 to \$30,664,882. During this time, the College has grown its financial reserves and invested money into equipment and facilities improvements for programs. More importantly, because Northwest’s mission focuses on “providing superior living [student services] and learning [instruction] environments,” the College has continued to allocate its budget so that expenditures demonstrate the institution’s priorities of student learning in and beyond the classroom, including through residence hall programming. The College also has significant support through the NWC Foundation. (See Criterion Two for an extended discussion of Northwest’s financial resources.)

Northwest’s economic impact is significant. During 2009, the College carried an employee payroll of \$16,709,827 (salary and benefits), making it the fifth largest employer in Park County. Northwest also expended annually \$3,505,234 on goods and services in Park County.

Significant Changes Since the 2001 Accreditation

Since North Central’s 2001 visit, five factors have significantly affected the culture of Northwest College: changes in leadership; challenges to shared governance; the creation of a culture of assessment; changes at the State level; and increases in student enrollment.

Changes in Leadership

The College has had three presidents in addition to one interim president since 2001. Each president has had a significant impact on the College.

- **Frances Feinerman** (July 1998–July 2002)
In July 1998, Dr. Frances Feinerman, Campus Director of the University of Alaska Southeast’s Ketchikan campus, arrived at Northwest to assume the presidency. Using the results of a comprehensive market research study conducted during the previous year and input from a series of community meetings, President Feinerman committed the College to creating a strategic plan before the end of her first year. She also took aggressive budget reallocation measures to reposition Northwest for the future, strengthened workforce development programming, hired consultants Noel Levitz whose work led to Student Services changes, and prepared the College for anticipated enrollment declines and related budget declines.



Overview



- **Elise Schneider** (July 2002–June 2003)
After President Frances Feinerman’s resignation in July 2002, Northwest College trustees selected Dr. Elise Schneider, retired president of Oxnard College in California, to serve in a one-year interim position during a nationwide presidential search. She expanded international recruiting and improved relations with the community.



- **Miles LaRowe** (July 2003–June 2008)
Dr. Miles LaRowe, the President of Eastern Idaho Technical College in Idaho Falls, accepted the presidency of Northwest in July 2003. President LaRowe oversaw more than \$5 million in campus renovations in five years. Several buildings were updated, including Lewis and Clark Hall, which had been closed for two years. The Cody and Worland Centers were both expanded, and a facilities master plan was developed. Also under President LaRowe’s watch, the College’s financial integrity and health were improved. The NWC Foundation’s “Toward New Vistas,” a successful \$8 million endowment campaign, was conducted. In addition, the institution became the first “Disaster Resistant University” in Wyoming, a designation granted by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.



- **Paul Prestwich** (June 2008–Present)
After President LaRowe’s announcement in the summer of 2007 that he would retire after the 2007–2008 academic year, a national search resulted in the hiring of Dr. Paul Prestwich as the College’s new president. Raised in Colorado, Dr. Prestwich had most recently been Vice President for Academic Affairs at Sussex County Community College in New Jersey. He took the Northwest College helm in June 2008, charged by the Board of Trustees to implement the *Facilities Master Plan*, contribute to the State’s funding formula revisions, and track the work of the Community College Task Force Planning Study impaneled by the Wyoming State Legislature earlier that same year. He facilitated the process for a significant budget reduction and has been a supporter of academic quality and student support initiatives.

It should also be noted that during this time, significant turnover occurred on Northwest’s publicly elected Board of Trustees.

Aside from leadership and morale issues during presidential and Board transitions, perhaps the single most significant impact was on institutional planning and implementation. Each president brought with him or her different philosophies and experiences related to planning, some of which were flavored by significantly different attitudes about shared governance.

Challenges to Shared Governance

Northwest College has a long tradition of shared governance that has shaped the

College and is seen by many as a source of institutional vitality. The central role of shared governance became clear on 1 March 1966, when the Board of Trustees, facilitated by the College President, revoked tenure, choosing not to renew the contracts of eight faculty and terminating two outright, eliminating roughly 40% of the faculty. This action closely followed the College's first successful independent accreditation in 1964. Faculty participation in writing the self-study led to an expectation of shared governance; administrators and Board members saw this as inappropriate for employees who should simply teach classes and allow others to run the College.

To mediate this conflict, several organizations became involved: North Central Accrediting Agency, the National and Wyoming Education Associations, the American Association of University Professors, and the American Civil Liberties Union. The summer of 1966 found three teams visiting the campus to gather data that became the basis for three reports. Ultimately, most devastating was North Central's decision to place Northwest Community College on academic probation. College faculty and the Board began working together to address governance issues: President SinClair Orendorff was hired; *The Faculty Handbook* was rewritten to clarify policies and procedures; and the institution committed itself to shared governance. In 1969, after submitting a voluntary self-study, Northwest Community College was removed from academic probation.

Even though this event happened more than 40 years ago, its influence has been profound. Northwest College remains committed to shared governance and is, indeed, a bit of an anomaly: a rural, two-year college located in a right-to-work state with a carefully defined rank and tenure system, faculty-led curriculum, professional development, and program development, and a strong system of shared governance. Staff participate in shared governance as well, and the philosophy is taught to students. In terms of student governance, students enrolled in six or more credit hours are automatically members of the Associated Students of Northwest College. The governing body of ASNWC is the Student Senate, which is composed of five officers and five general representatives elected in the spring semester and seven additional general representatives elected in the fall. Through appointment or election by the Senate, students are represented on many college committees that assist in governance of the institution.

Because of shared governance, faculty and staff see themselves not just as employees but as stakeholders. This investment manifests itself in the hours faculty teach and devote to students beyond courses, the many student activities faculty and staff sponsor and attend, and in the service they provide through committee and community work. Wyoming has a boom-and-bust economy; the College's shared governance structure provides a mechanism for dealing with financial instability. The College has seen significant presidential and administrative turnover since President Orendorff's retirement in 1988. In both cases, having a committed faculty and staff participating in the College through shared governance has provided a stability that has allowed students to continue their educations while remaining largely unaware of the other issues.



Overview

“The State of Wyoming’s system of higher education has become progressively more top-down through the intervention of the increasingly powerful Wyoming Community College Commission, ...”

To say that Northwest has not seen conflict over shared governance would be inaccurate. In fact, issues over governance have been at the core of some of the College’s most contentious disagreements. However, it’s important to see them as more than fights; rather, they provide opportunities for the college community to re-evaluate its values and arrive at compromise. Moreover, these conflicts testify to the commitment of those who care deeply about this college and its place in its service area.

The College’s internal governance issues will face new challenges as external forces come to bear on what has always been internal decision-making. The State of Wyoming’s system of higher education has become progressively more top-down through the intervention of the increasingly powerful Wyoming Community College Commission, which was formed primarily as a coordinating body but has been given more authority by the State Legislature. The College remains sensitive to external influences on its governance system, and how it will navigate this shift while preserving one of its most essential core values remains a central question.

Three governance-related issues merit additional discussion: College Council, handbook consolidation, and the creation of the Administrative Staff Organization.

College Council

To address governance concerns raised in the 1991 self-study, the College took a number of steps, perhaps most significant the creation of College Council. Launched officially in May 1992, College Council is comprised of representatives elected by constituent groups, including Students, Faculty, Professional Staff, Classified Staff, and Administrators. 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. It is also the role of College Council representatives to communicate to their constituencies concerns, points of view, ideas, and recommendations regarding items submitted for discussion. It is expected that all major policy and budgetary decisions will be presented to College Council for review and discussion prior to implementation. The Council meets once monthly during the academic year with more frequent meetings to discuss specific topics (e.g., budget issues).

However, its effectiveness has varied from president to president and from chairperson to chairperson rather than from its established place in the governance structure. For College Council to be more effective, it needs adherence to its stated functions, skilled leadership, and members committed to its charge and communication with constituency group members.

Handbook Consolidation

Since 2001, Northwest’s governance handbooks have seen significant revision. Through 1997, there were three recognized constituency

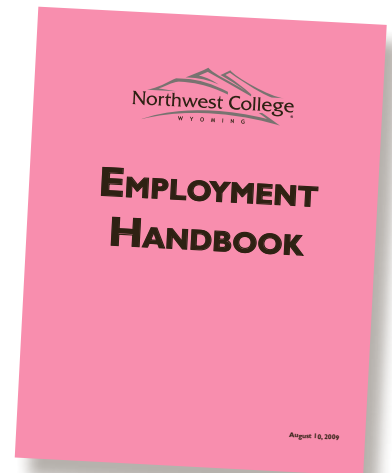
groups of employees: Faculty, Professional Staff, and Classified Staff. *The Faculty Handbook*, *The Professional Staff Handbook*, and *The Classified Staff Handbook* housed policies and procedures documents relevant to these constituencies, with each book having a clearly articulated revision process. In 1997, the Dean of Administrative Services initiated creation of the *Institutional Handbook*, a repository for policy documents common to all employee constituencies.

The LaRowe presidency featured another major revision of governance documentation with the creation of the *Employee Handbook* as an anthology of not just former *Institutional Handbook* policies, but an expanded additional collection of new policies and procedures, some of which applied to faculty, and some of which did not. In 2008, the Board of Trustees initiated a revision of what had been *The Faculty Handbook* into a purely contractual body of “Faculty Employment Policies” located in the larger *Employment Handbook*. At first glance, this would seem to be another attempt at “housecleaning” documents to clarify college policies and procedures. Some argued that the consolidation of *The Faculty Handbook* with the *Employment Handbook* led to a decrease in the status of faculty as campus and governance leaders and more limited focus on the discussion between faculty, administration, and the Board in favor of a legal text. Important information about committees, decision-making, and college processes were also lost in these changes. The drafting of a *Shared Governance Handbook* in 2010 was an effort to provide an updated version of this lost information.

Reduced to the “Faculty Employment Policies” section of the *Employment Handbook*, *The Faculty Handbook* became much less useful in college operations. Prior to consolidation, *The Faculty Handbook* had been the major source of process, governance, and committee information, and the loss of this material was significant. Governance materials were moved to an internal document, *The Governance Handbook*, initiated by the President’s Advisory Council in the summer of 2009.

Creation of the Administrative Staff as a Fifth Constituency

The 2004–2005 *Catalog* lists “Administration” as consisting of the President and four Vice Presidents; the 2005–2006 *Catalog* lists 14 positions as “Administration”; and the 2006–2007 *Catalog* defines “Administrative Staff” as the President, the four vice-presidents, and additional positions that had previously been classified as members of the Professional Staff. President LaRowe proposed this new constituent group, citing that it was common practice at many other colleges (referencing some other Wyoming Community Colleges) to categorize several mid- to upper-level directors as “Administrators.” Initially it was difficult to determine what positions should be included in the proposed group, so Dr. LaRowe determined that decision-making authority and budget administration would serve as criteria for membership. The President served as the spokesperson for the Administrative Staff.



Overview

“All areas of campus were asked to write learning outcomes and assessment plans. These efforts for everyone from coaches to custodians were guided by one overarching question: ‘How do you and your area contribute to student learning?’”

For two years, this group existed largely outside the governance system. Many members did serve on key committees, but any committee based on constituency membership did not have a clear place for this new staff group. This group also had no identified place in the shared governance structure. The Board was very concerned about this issue, and at their request, during the summer of 2007, Administrative Staff members developed the infrastructure for an organization, which excluded the President. By-laws were developed and approved by the Board of Trustees in October 2007. The group’s purpose (as defined in the by-laws) “is to represent and advocate for the interests of the administrative staff employees and Northwest College.” The Administrative Staff was further clarified by the Fox-Lawson compensation system, which led to the implementation of a position-classification system based on decision-making. As a result, a number of positions throughout the organization were re-classified.

The Creation of a Culture of Assessment

In 2001, North Central requested that Northwest become much more aggressive about assessment, requesting a monitoring report be submitted in 2003. The College began by revisiting its academic assessment program with faculty developing learning outcomes at the course, program, general education, and all-college levels in addition to specifying how those outcomes would be measured. Those data were then reported to the Office for Academic Affairs and used as a basis for institutional improvement. (See Criterion Three for an extended discussion of academic assessment.) Northwest has seen a significant infusion of grant monies since 2001, and some of that money has been used to enhance assessment. (See Criterion Three for an extended discussion.)

The College moved beyond its academic assessment plan in 2006–2007 when it embarked on a major institutional assessment initiative. All areas of campus were asked to write learning outcomes and assessment plans. These efforts for everyone from coaches to custodians were guided by one overarching question: “How do you and your area contribute to student learning?” The results were impressive and asked employees to reconsider their place in the institution. However, implementation of institutional assessment has been inconsistent in relation to these outcomes. The presence of an institutional researcher will make campus-wide assessment follow-up more possible.

Changes at the State Level

Wyoming is the only state with just one established four-year university. (Wyoming Catholic College is a newly created, private, four-year liberal arts college.) Wyoming has been recognized for the quality of its community colleges. According to a 2008 Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government study, Wyoming leads the country in terms of having the largest share of total higher education enrollment in community colleges; its percentage of residents attending two-year colleges is second only to California.⁴

4 See David F. Shaffer’s “The States and Their Community Colleges,” *Education Policy Brief*, May 2008, in the Resource Room.



Significant state-level changes fall into two categories: The changing role of the Wyoming Community College Commission (WCCC) and budget issues.

The Changing Role of the Wyoming Community College Commission

Northwest College is part of a community college system, coordinated by the Wyoming Community College Commission, a group of seven appointees that oversees a staff headed by an executive director. No more than four members may be from counties in which a community college district is located, and no more than four members may be of the same political party. *Ex officio* members include the Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

According to the Commission's bylaws, "The mission and purpose of the Commission is to provide coordination, advocacy, and accountability for the Community College System on behalf of the State of Wyoming (Article II, Section 1). The Commission is responsible for

- **State funding**—Wyoming community colleges send a joint request for State funds to the Commission. The budgeting process starts with the Commission, which sets system budget priorities and develops a system-wide request for the next biennium. State-allocated funds are then given to the Commission, which then distributes the money to the various colleges by use of a Commission-established funding formula.
- **New credit programs**—The Commission approves all new credit programs for certificate or for degree to be offered by any Wyoming community college.
- **Capital construction**—The Commission must approve any new capital construction projects with costs exceeding \$100,000.
- **Tuition rates**—The Commission sets the tuition rate for all Wyoming community colleges; however, each college establishes its own fees.
- **Internet access**—The Commission provides internet access for the community colleges in addition to contracting for Datatel, the colleges' administrative and student data management computing system.
- **Data collection**—Each community college is required to submit enrollment data to the Commission at the end of each academic term. The Commission then reports to the Governor, the Legislature, and the State Department of Education in addition to providing information to other state agencies or interested parties. The data currently collected for the *Annual Performance Report* include information on subjects such as graduation and transfer rates, employer assessments, and responsiveness to community needs. Other reports that are submitted to the Commission annually include semester Enrollment Reports, a Workforce Development Report, an Accreditation Report, and a Partnership Report.

Overview

“The State of Wyoming funds state operations biennially—those biennial revenue allocations represent roughly 64% of Northwest’s budget.”

The College provides supplemental data to the Commission when requested through *ad hoc* reports and provides student record data to facilitate the reporting required by the Wyoming Department of Education to administer the Hathaway Scholarship Program.”⁵

Budget Issues

A variety of budgetary issues complicate the College’s financial status and planning process.

The State of Wyoming funds state operations biennially—those biennial revenue allocations represent roughly 64% of Northwest’s budget. (The exact amount varies from biennium to biennium, in part depending upon the strength of local revenues in comparison with the local revenue of other community college districts.) The State legislature, working with the Governor’s office, passes a budget appropriation for the community college system. By law, the Governor must submit and the Legislature must pass a balanced budget.

Added to this appropriation is the 4-mil tax revenue from the seven counties that have community colleges. Although Wyoming receives tax revenues from sales and property taxes, currently only 7 of the 23 counties in Wyoming levy property tax mills for the support of the community college located in its county. (Some of the richest counties do not host a college and therefore do not collect property taxes specifically for colleges.) Local property taxes depend heavily on the mineral industries and consequently may be impacted by boom-and-bust cycles. On several occasions, the Legislature has debated the merits of a statewide mil levy to support community colleges, but legislation has not been enacted.

This annualized funding amount is then separated into a variable-cost portion and a fixed-cost portion for each college. The variable-cost portion can also be described as the cost of instruction. The fixed costs for each college are calculated from actual expenditures for a previous fiscal year (e.g., for the 2011–2012 biennium, FY 2008 was used). These costs are funded by the state appropriation at 100%. The remaining portion of the appropriation is then allocated to each college based on its percentage of the base period total credit hours taught in the State. This allocation is paid by the State at the system-wide average credit hour cost, which may be more or less than the college’s actual credit hour costs.

Normally this means that each college knows by the end of March what its state-level budget will be for the next two fiscal years (barring an unanticipated reduction in state revenues or a redistribution of funds based on actual local revenue as compared to the estimated revenue used in the original distribution formula). The funding allocation model also contains two provisions for an exception budget request. The first provision is for an external cost adjustment to fixed costs. The second provision is for enrollment growth funding to address the costs of increasing enrollment. These exception budget requests may or may not be funded by the Legislature.

.....
5 See Commission Reports in the Resource Room.

Generally, the State has funded the community colleges relatively well, and the process tends to provide some predictability. The biennial budget also provides some security because an institution can anticipate its funding for two successive years although such a budgeting system makes it difficult to plan more than two years in advance. Growth in the percentage of the college budget that comes from the State has produced increased state scrutiny and may eventually lead to a reduction of local autonomy. For state revenues, Wyoming relies heavily on severance tax levies on the extractive industries (oil, natural gas, and coal). Since these industries are subject to boom-and-bust cycles, the State has occasionally found itself facing significant projected shortfalls although boom years can result in additional funding (e.g., salary increases in 2007; additional funds for major maintenance; significant budget reductions as gas and oil prices fell in the 2008–2009 recession).

Increased Student Enrollments and International Student Population

As Table 0.1 illustrates, Northwest has seen significant enrollment increases. Since 2001, enrollment has increased by 39%. Northwest has also seen an expansion of its international student population. This is the result of two areas of activity: increased international student recruiting and new relationships with international agencies. Northwest is enthusiastic about its expanded student populations, which provide important cultural and learning opportunities for students and the community.



Accreditation History

The following section provides a summary of Northwest’s accreditation history.

- 1964:** On 9 April 1964, Northwest Community College received full accreditation from the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges.
- 1967:** The College was placed on probation after the Board of Trustees voted to revoke tenure.
- 1968:** In 1968, a new college administration, led by President SinClair Orendorff, initiated a voluntary self-study that led to a 10-year accreditation.
- 1979:** The North Central evaluating team recommended a five-year accreditation with a focus visit scheduled for 1980. This recommendation was the result of issues surrounding the academic administration and the role of occupational programs in relation to the instructional curriculum at Northwest. The 1980 visit led to the recommendation by the evaluating team that the College had addressed problems satisfactorily. In 1983, North Central conducted a comprehensive visit resulting in the College’s receiving a seven-year continued accreditation period.



Overview

“Work began on the 2010 self-study in the spring of 2006 with the formation of the Self-study Executive Committee.”

- 1990:** North Central recommended that Northwest receive a ten-year accreditation with a 1994 focus visit to address issues concerning governance, assessment, planning, and the College’s adaptation to the “Omnibus Bill,” recent Wyoming legislation that gave greater authority to the Wyoming Community College Commission. The focus visiting team noted in its report that while Northwest had made acceptable progress in terms of governance and planning, the assessment plan remained unacceptable.
- 1995:** Northwest submitted a new assessment plan, which North Central subsequently approved, and the College had met its accreditation obligations through 2001.
- 2001:** North Central granted Northwest full accreditation status, describing Northwest’s 2000–2001 self-study as “evaluative and comprehensive.”
- In North Central’s report, evaluators noted that Northwest had “attempted to address the concerns of the 1990–91 comprehensive team and the 1994 focus visit team, even though more progress is needed in institutional planning.” A progress report was requested for submission in the summer of 2002 in which the College re-evaluated its strategic plan. In 2002, the planning progress report was submitted and accepted by North Central. (For more on Northwest’s planning processes, see Criterion Two.)
 - The Evaluating Team also made clear the need for the College “to fulfill more aggressively the requirements of NCA for assessment” and requested that a supplemental report be submitted in the summer of 2003. The report was received positively by North Central, and since then, Northwest has worked aggressively to create a campus-wide culture of assessment. (See Criterion Three for more on academic assessment.)

The 2010 Report

Work began on the 2010 self-study in the spring of 2006 with the formation of the Self-study Executive Committee. When creating the committee, an emphasis was placed on academic diversity with committee members taken from administrative and faculty positions from across campus. Membership is shown in Table 0.2.

Table 0.2
Self-study Executive Committee

AREA	COMMITTEE CHAIRS
CRITERION I: “Mission & Integrity”	Kim Mills, <i>Vice President for Administrative Services</i> Steve Thulin, <i>Associate Professor of History</i>
CRITERION II: “Preparing for the Future”	Dana Young, <i>Vice President for Student Affairs</i> Allan Childs, <i>Associate Professor of Chemistry and Mathematics</i>
CRITERION III: “Student Learning & Effective Teaching”	Sher Hruska, <i>Vice President for Academic Affairs</i> Elise Kimble, <i>Assistant Professor of Biology</i>
CRITERION IV: “Acquisition, Discovery & Applications of Knowledge”	Ronda Peer, <i>Dean of Extended Campus and Workforce</i> Mike Masterson, <i>Professor of Music</i>
CRITERION V: “Engagement & Service”	Virginia Fish, <i>Dean of Student Learning and Academic Support</i> Rob Koelling, <i>Professor of English</i>
FINANCIAL ANALYSIS	Sheldon Flom, <i>Finance Director</i> Gary Sturmer, <i>Professor of Political Science and Economics</i>
CHAIRPERSON	Duane Fish, <i>Professor of Speech Communication</i>
SELF-STUDY AUTHOR	Renee Dechert, <i>Associate Professor of English</i>
COLLEGE PRESIDENT	Paul Prestwich, <i>Northwest College President</i>
COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR	Mark Kitchen, <i>Vice President for College Relations</i>
INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH	Lisa Smith, <i>Institutional Researcher</i>
NWC FOUNDATION	Shelby Wetzel, <i>NWC Foundation Executive Director</i>
FACULTY	Charlotte Patrick, <i>Professor of Communication</i>

As part of the self-study process, the College began a self-examination with a 2007–2008 revision of Northwest’s mission, goals, and enduring values providing the nexus of the process. This also coincided with a major facilities planning initiative. This self-study represents several years of campus-wide work, research, and reflection.

Final Thoughts and Future Plans

The Bridger Hall fire was a significant campus moment but not a defining one; rather, after the cleanup and insurance settlement, the College used this event as a springboard for growth with an eye toward enhancing student learning opportunities and a commitment to student learning, community engagement, and ongoing improvement.

