Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A Regular Interim Report

Spokane Falls Community College
Spokane, Washington

October 9-10, 2008

Prepared by

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and

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**Institutional Accreditation History**

Spokane Falls Community College was originally granted accreditation as a community college in 1967 by the Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools. The accredited status of Spokane Falls Community College has been reaffirmed upon subsequent evaluation visits, with the last full-scale visit occurring in October 2003. In its report, the 2003 evaluation team gave the college five general commendations concerning its positive climate; academic creativity; strong and capable faculty, staff and administration; ambitious international studies and Study-Abroad programs; and its rich array of student activities and student programs. The team also made five general recommendations to the college. Recommendations 2 and 4 were the subject of a 2004 progress report that was accepted by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities in 2005. Recommendations 1, 3, and 5 were the subject of a 2005 Focused Interim visit and report. During that visit, the evaluator issued a revised version of Recommendation 1 while reporting that the college had addressed the concerns outlined in Recommendations 3 and 5. In response to the continued issues with Recommendation 1, the college hosted another Focused Interim visit in 2006. Once again, the evaluator issued a revised version of Recommendation 1 and the Commission asked that SFCC submit a Progress Report on this recommendation in the fall of 2007. This progress report was accepted by the Commission in February 2008. The college was then asked to prepare for a Regular Fifth Year Interim Report and visit in October of 2008.

**Summary of Report and Visit**

The evaluators found the College's Interim Report to be informative and well-organized and commend the college on its efforts to produce this report.

The evaluators used arranged interviews with appropriate college representatives, open meetings with faculty and students, review of supporting and requested documents, and review of the college website and Intranet sites to gather data and validate the College's Interim Report. The evaluators met jointly, or individually, with the following college personnel and students during their visit:

**Administrative Team:**

Dr. Mark T. Palek, President
Dan Whye, SFCC Manager, Financial Analysis
Lynn Holmes, District Director of Fiscal Services
Anne Tucker, District Public Information Officer
Greg Plummer, District Director of Facilities
Gregory Roberts, Associate Dean of Student Life and Programs for New Students
Steven Bays, Dean of Student Services for Enrollment Services and Student Development
Jille Shankar, Associate Dean of Financial Aid and Student Employment
Alex Roberts, Vice President of Student and Administrative Services
Pam Tajima Praeger, Vice President of Learning
Shanda Diehl, Director of Institutional Research
Jim Brady, Dean of Instruction, Computing, Math and Science

Howard Braham, Acting Director of Institutional Research
**Administrative Team, cont'd:**
Jan Swinton, Compliance Coordinator, SFCC/IEL
Rod Taylor, Acting Dean of Instruction for Business and Workforce Education
Jim Waller, Dean of Equity, Diversity, and Special Initiatives and Visiting Scholar for Multicultural Education
Glen Cosby, Interim Dean of Instruction for Social Sciences, Philosophy, and Academic Initiatives
Dan Wenger, Dean of Instruction for Arts and Humanities
Jim Minkler, District Academic Services Officer
Greg Stevens, District Chief Human Resources Officer
Mary Ann Goodwin, Dean of Library and Distance Learning

**Faculty:**
Don Brunner, Associate Vice President for Higher Education, SFCC/Accounting Faculty Connie Carlson, Early Childhood Education/Human Services/Professional-Technical; Manager/ Adjunct Faculty
Rachel Wang, Chemistry
Lori Monnastes, ITALIC, English
Judy Noel, Faculty Development Coordinator, Education
Barbara Williamson, Learning Communities Coordinator, English
George Suttle, Reference Librarian
Jan Wingenroth, Reference Librarian
Josh Hogan, Reference Librarian
Heather Keast, English/Title 3
Paul Halversen, Music
Mark Wylie, Economics
Adriana Bishop, Chemistry
Jean Nealey, Reading/Developmental English
Paula Swan, Library Technician Program
Billy Bataille, Economics
Carolyn Stephens, Art
Polly McMahon, Social Services-Gerontology
Sandy Ross, Education
LeighAnna Drake, Early Childhood Education
Mary Ann Sharkey, Physical Therapist Assistant
Marie Cole, Physical Therapist Assistant
Laura Read, English
Christie L. Anderson, English
Bradley Bleck, English
Evelyn Florio, Sociology

**Staff:**
Rod Larse, Instructional Technology Manager
Babs Hachey, Library Supervisor

**Students:**

Sheena Thompson
Alex Croutch
Oscar Ocana
Certhoux Eve
Miki Asai
SimHayKin Jack
John Allen
Bruce Steele

The evidence room was well-organized and provided sufficient background documentation for the visit.  The evaluators were provided with requested access to all areas of the college campus, college documents and college staff, and wish to thank the college for its openness and hospitality during the team's visit.

**Part A**

**Recommendation One**

**Recommendation 1: (2003 Full-Scale Evaluation Committee Report) SFCC has developed a strategic plan to guide its future development. However, SFCC is one part of a multi-unit district that includes two other instructional units (Spokane Community College and the Institute for Extended Learning). Since the district itself has yet to develop a detailed and specific strategic plan of its own, it cannot be determined if SFCC's strategic plan assumes roles and responsibilities that are consistent with the district's vision for the college. It is recommended that the Community Colleges of Spokane District develop a strategic plan that clarifies "authority, responsibilities, and relationships" among its constituent institutions (Standards 6A., 6A.1., 6A.4).**

**Recommendation 1: (2005 Focused Interim Report)  CCS has developed a detailed strategic plan of its own which sets forth goals, objectives and action plans for the District office and all three of its institutions. The Strategic Plan and associated *IEL Task Force Report* have communicated the District's intention to clarify "authority, roles and responsibilities" among the three institutions. There is no evidence, however, to indicate that the District's work so far has resulted in significant change. As a consequence, the evaluator is not satisfied that the spirit of Recommendation 1 has been addressed. CCS should take action to ensure that clarification is achieved and that the "system policies, regulations, and procedures" needed to support this clarification be "clearly defined" (Standard 6.A, 6.A.1., 6.A.4).**

**Recommendation 1: (2006 Focused Interim Report)  The evaluator recommends that Spokane Falls Community College take all steps necessary to ensure that courses offered for credit by the Institute for Extended Learning "must remain under the sole and direct control of the sponsoring accredited institution which exercises ultimate and continuing responsibility for the performance of these functions as reflected in the contract, with provisions to ensure that conduct of the courses meets the standards of its regular programs…as these pertain to…instruction in the courses…appointment and validation of credentials of faculty teaching the course" (Policy A-6.d).**

Since originally receiving Recommendation 1 in 2003 Spokane Falls Community College has hosted two Focused Interim Visits regarding this recommendation.  Each of those visits has resulted in a revised recommendation dealing with Standard 6 and/or Policy A-6.

Spokane Falls Community College, along with Spokane Community College and the Institute for Extended Leaning, make up Washington State Community College District #17.  Spokane Falls Community College and Spokane Community College are independently accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.  The Institute for Extended learning is not accredited but offers some credit bearing courses under the accredited status of Spokane Falls Community College.

The original 2003 recommendation acknowledged Spokane Falls Community College's work on a Strategic Plan but noted that the lack of a Strategic Plan at the District level was contributing to a lack of clarity with regard to the "authority, responsibilities and relationships" between Spokane Falls Community College and the rest of the institutions in the district.

In response to this recommendation, the Community Colleges of Spokane developed a District Strategic Plan in 2004 and has since developed a new strategic plan that covers 2008-2011. In conjunction with that the District Plan, Spokane Falls Community College has created a strategic plan that covers 2008-2013.

Despite the creation of the strategic plan at the district level in 2004, the college received a revised recommendation at the conclusion of a focused visit in 2005. The evaluator found that despite the creation of the documents, no evidence could be found that the documents had led to any significant changes regarding the original recommendation. The recommendation from the 2005 visit also specifically noted the relationship between Spokane Falls Community College and the Institute for Extended Leaning as an area in need of clarification.

In response to this recommendation, the college continued to work to formulate clear agreements and policies for the relationship between SFCC and IEL by appointing a Task Force to investigate the relationship and to make recommendations regarding these issues. During the 2006 Focused Interim visit, the evaluator found that the college's work in this area had addressed the concerns with Standard 6.A but that the college still had work to do in the area of Policy A-6 regarding the IEL/SFCC relationship. Is response to these issues, a third version of Recommendation 1 was issued directing Spokane Falls Community College to "take all necessary steps to ensure that courses offered for credit by the Institute for Extended Learning remain under the sole and direct control of (SFCC)." The college was asked to submit a Progress Report to NWCCU in the fall of 2007 regarding this recommendation. That report was accepted by NWCCU in February of 2008.

A review of documents and interviews with SFCC administrators and faculty clearly shows that there has been a significant amount of work done to ensure that the credit courses taught by the Institute for Extended Learning are under the sole and direct control of SFCC. In response to the recommendation from 2006, SFCC and IEL created a jointly funded position of "Compliance Coordinator, SFCC Off-Campus Credit Delivery." A long time SFCC faculty member was hired to fill this position and was given the charge of clarifying and formalizing the relationship between SFCC and IEL to ensure that SFCC had direct control of credit courses. The Compliance Coordinator has submitted two reports to the SFCC President regarding this issue, the most recent of which was submitted in September of 2007. That report outlines the significant progress that has been made and is continuing to be made in this area.

Specific examples of improvement include a new system of approving faculty and tracking the qualification of faculty teaching credit courses at the IEL centers, a new system for tracking textbooks used in credit courses at IEL centers, and significant attempts to include IEL faculty in departmental and college assessment activities and trainings. It is clear from discussions with faculty that there is a much more positive view of the relationship between IEL and SFCC than there was during any of the previous three visits regarding this issue. Faculty report a renewed

sense of collegiality and "give-and-take" between IEL instructors and SFCC instructors. Furthermore, the work of the Compliance Coordinator to get more of these policies and practices down in writing will help to ensure that these new practices will continue even with the reduction of the Compliance Coordinator position to part-time.

There is still work to be done to ensure that IEL faculty teaching credit courses are focusing on and assessing the same Course Abilities Learning Outcomes and General Education Learning Outcomes as faculty at SFCC. While IEL faculty have access to all outcomes measurements used at SFCC, a review of departmental binders shows that the process for ensuring the IEL courses are meeting the same outcomes as SFCC courses is still uneven across campus. Additionally, SFCC and IEL must remain vigilant in ensuring that the policies and procedures that have been put into place since 2006 remain a focus for both institutions.

Nevertheless, SFCC and the IEL should be proud of the progress that has been made in this area during the past five years and with regard to Policy A-6.

**Recommendation 2: SFCC makes a serious effort to support professional development, but this effort is compromised by the lack of financial resources needed to support professional development activities at an adequate level. It is recommended that SFCC increase its support for professional development activities (Standard 4.A.3).**

In 2004 Spokane Falls Community College sent a report to the commission addressing this issue and as a result of this report neither of the following focused visits addressed this issue. The faculty and administration now report satisfaction with what has been achieved. An initial $100,000 was budgeted for faculty development and that amount is actually more than $100,000 due to other available resources. All resources are well used by the faculty. Each faculty member has access to $1000 per three year period and the money is used with mini-grants for conferences, workshops, educational materials, association membership dues, etc. The faculty can also apply for and request funding for up to three quarters of sabbatical time. Twenty-nine faculty have made commendable use of this time in the last five years, a fact which was proudly reported to the evaluators. Per standard 4.A.3, the evaluators have seen substantial evidence to determine that SFCC has adequately addressed the issues surrounding this recommendation.

**Recommendation 3: SFCC does not have a fully implemented program of educational assessment. While some programs have developed student learning outcomes and other indicators of a mature, educational assessment program, many others have not done so. SFCC must quickly and decisively move to implement its educational assessment program in all of its instructional programs (Standard 2B., Policy 2.2) .**

Five years after receiving a recommendation regarding its lack of a sufficient system and methodology for assessing learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional level, things have significantly improved. While some individuals had worked on these issues throughout the years there was little to show for the work beyond individual course level assessment at the time of the 2003 visit. After significant time, effort and reorganization, along with one more focused visit in 2005, the college received a commendation on its creation and implementation of its educational assessment program. Some processes such as Course Abilities

and Learning Outcomes (CALOs) and a matrix based on the Nichols' Five-Column Model were already in place in 2003. Following that visit the Outcomes Committee became the Institutional Teaching and Learning Improvement Coordinating (ITALIC) Committee and funds were used to provide an outcomes training course (Outcomes 101) mini-grants, and general workshops and individual help to faculty, departments and divisions. These helped faculty learn what course and program assessment really were and how they could implement assessment techniques in their areas and use the results to improve teaching and learning for students. Their success has created its own cycle of further success as faculty, deans and administration can finally see the ends/beginnings of useful ongoing assessment in improving their courses and programs. This goes beyond the course/program level and is being successfully implemented at all levels, including general education assessment throughout the entire school. The evaluators were impressed as they talked with people involved at all levels and examined the documents and evidence provided.

**Recommendation 4: SFCC does not have governing board policies that guide "the use and limit of debt." Likewise, the college lacks a policy to guide its cash investment. The district governing board should adopt these required policies. (Standards 7A.4, 7C.4)**

These policies were approved by the Community Colleges of Spokane Board of Trustees in February 2004 and are still in place. The Commission also determined that sufficient progress had been made with regard to this recommendation in 2005.

**Recommendation 5: SFCC's institutional effectiveness program, whereby it "evaluates how well, and in what ways, it is accomplishing its mission and goals and uses the results for broad-based continuous planning and evaluation," has not been fully implemented and institutionalized. SFCC needs to settle on a workable institutional effectiveness model and implement that model with resolve. (Standard 1B.)**

Spokane Falls Community College has established, fully implemented and institutionalized an institutional effectiveness program.

SFCC is in the fifth annual cycle of a four-part continuous improvement model which includes the establishment of goals, the development and implementation of plans to assess these goals, the conducting of assessment activities, and the understanding and use of those assessment results. The model is well understood across campus and includes clear reporting of assessment results and clear examples of how those results are being used to improve SFCC. Additionally, it is clear that budget requests are tied to department and college goals that have been developed as a part of the institutional effectiveness model and that the results of those assessment activities are used to allocate resources and to establish priorities for future assessment cycles. NWCCU found SFCC to be substantially in compliance with Standard 1.B following the 2005 Focused Interim visit and it is clear that SFCC has continued to make progress in this area since that time.

**Part B**

**Standard One: Institutional Mission and Goals, Planning and Effectiveness**

Spokane Falls Community College has a clear mission and set of goals which are outlined in the *2008-2013 SFCC Strategic Plan.* The plan was developed with widespread input form all sectors of SFCC and in alignment with the *2008-2011 Community Colleges of Spokane Strategic Plan.* The plan has been widely distributed and will be used in the same manner that the college used the recently completed 2002-2007 plan. In this process, a number of "priorities" are selected each academic year based upon the assessment of the previous year in relation to the strategic plan. Benchmarks are established for key indicators that are used to measure success in meeting these priorities. At the end of the assessment cycle the results are published in the annual Institutional Effectiveness Report. From this report an institutional "scorecard" is issued which assesses whether or not the benchmarks for the key indicators were met during the previous assessment cycle. This assessment information is then used to set priorities for the subsequent year.

Documentation provided during the visit along with interviews with faculty and administration show that this institutional effectiveness model has become part of the culture of SFCC. The mission and goals are understood throughout the institution and they are the driving force behind future planning at the college and behind resource allocation. Faculty and students report widespread involvement in and satisfaction with the process both in institutional survey data and in discussions with evaluators. The college shows a commitment to gathering input from students and faculty through a variety of survey instruments. Information gleaned from these surveys has been used to guide the college in its strategic planning process, as well as to assess its success in accomplishing its goals.

The college's strategic planning process appears to have widespread input, is well integrated into the institution, and is having a positive impact on the direction of the college. Moreover, the college has developed and implemented an institutional effectiveness program that leads to continuous improvement throughout the institution as is outlined in the response to Recommendation 5.

**Standard Two: Educational Program and Its Effectiveness**

As noted above in the response to Recommendation 3 Spokane Falls Community College has done a significant amount of work in this area in response the findings of the evaluators in 2003. Please see that section for more information on Standard 2.

After reviewing printed and electronic evidence and following conversations with faculty and administration the evaluators feel confident that standards 2A, 2B, 2C, 2G, and 2H are consistent with the college mission and goals and are being maintained. Policy 2.1 is also consistent at a collegiate student level and assessed regularly. The other policies of standard 2 are followed in an adequate manner for the college's needs though there is some faculty concern that study abroad programs have been reduced in number due to budget issues.

**Standard Three: Students**

While there have been numerous changes in staff and organization within the student services area at SFCC, including the hiring of a new Vice President of Student and Administrative Services in the summer of 2008, the policy changes in the last five years have been fairly minor. They include minor revisions to some grading policies and changes in Financial Aid implemented to comply with changes in Federal and State guidelines. New initiatives have been undertaken in the area of New Student Entry and, with the aid of a two-year *Foundations in Excellence Assessment Process*, the college has worked to focus on the success of its first year students.

Enrollment at SFCC has risen from 8,069 FTE in 2003 to 8,571 FTE in 2007.

Advising continues to be an area where the college is working to improve. With the help of a recently acquired Title III grant the college is experimenting with ways to enhance the student advising process which is currently handled in a variety of different manners throughout campus depending on the department and the student needs. While the students interviewed during the visit did not note any specific problems that they had encountered with advising at SFCC, they did mention hearing from other students who had encountered some confusion.

Student government is very involved at SFCC and student leaders report that their input is sought and is taken seriously by SFCC faculty, staff and administration as well as at the District level. Several examples of student involvement in areas such as increased security on campus and increased education regarding issues of tolerance were discussed by both faculty and administration.

Some concern was expressed in 2003 regarding the timeliness of evaluations of staff in the student services area but recent policies and a district-wide computerized evaluation process seem to have remedied this situation.

Students interviewed expressed great respect for the faculty, staff and administration of the college and voice their appreciation for the extra effort that all areas of the college expend in the name of student success.

**Standard Four: Faculty**

The institution typically employs professionally qualified faculty with at least a master's degree. They are involved in all aspects of the campus community, participating in most committee areas as they pertain to workload, curriculum planning, student life, academic planning, institutional governance, etc.

There remains some concern among some faculty that they are not able to advise all of the students as well as they would wish, though a recent Title III grant is addressing the issue and most students the evaluators talked with did not see this as an issue, believing they were independently successful at navigating the registration and graduation systems. The students

also believe that they can talk to the faculty anytime and therefore are most likely receiving lots of advising though they do not recognize it as such.

Faculty workloads remain consistent with findings from five years ago. They are expected to teach 15 credit hours each quarter with additional time spent in office hours, professional activities, committee service, community service, scholarship and research and program development. The faculty appear capable and willing to shoulder the load and view it as part of the job, and one, that for the majority, is greatly enjoyed.

In the last five years the school has had several retirements and has continued to find replacements for these positions. Faculty report they are comfortable with their master contract and do the best they can with state legislative appropriations. They reported that the best evidence is that people still choose to come and remain at the school as employees.

SFCC has a well-developed and well-published faculty evaluation process. This process is used for all full-time and adjunct faculty. It is particularly well-used and well-documented as a faculty member comes up for tenure review and advancement. Due to high turn-over in recent years among faculty deans and other administration positions a few faculty expressed the opinion that faculty evaluation had slipped in the last few months. One faculty member reported only being evaluated twice in ten years instead of every three years, but hers was the only voice of that opinion.

The evaluators saw no evidence that the institution prevented any kind of academic freedom. The college strategic plan works with, not against, the faculty as they pursue their own research, scholarship, and artistic creation.

The evaluators wish to commend the faculty for their collegiality, their dedication to the school and its students. They are working with each other across divisions and demonstrating to the students that no barriers need exist in the pursuit of knowledge. The faculty were praised by the students who have recognized the same thing.

**Standard Five: Library and Information Resources**

The library faculty are to be commended for their continued excellence in providing the best services possible in support of teaching, learning and in general the mission and goals of Spokane Falls Community College. They have recently been able to complete an addition and remodel of their building which has increased the study and student computer lab spaces. This has allowed them to reconfigure and better use other existing space. With the available budget they are working as rapidly as possible to increase the database search options for faculty and students as well as print books as requested. They feel chagrin at students' lack of use of print but realize the new age is electronic and are quickly moving ahead so that students feel no lack. This includes students involved in distance education who make good use of the electronic sources that are available.

The library faculty are themselves well-qualified educationally and continue to be involved in faculty development opportunities as they work to keep themselves at the top of their profession.

Faculty and students stated that services are adequate for their needs. Each faculty librarian serves on various academic committees and each is considered a member of another academic division, therefore the path of communication is open and can be quickly responded to as needs are expressed such as new courses, programs, databases or print materials that might help students and faculty in their endeavors. The library has recently started a program wherein they provide several copies of course texts for reserve or checkout for who have not yet been able to buy their own copies early in the quarter. This has led to fewer classes dropped due to a lack of textbooks.

The library faculty participate in the regular faculty evaluation process and are heavily involved in their own assessment reviews of their holdings, faculty, and classes as they work with each other to achieve the school mission and goals.

The other entities that also belong under the library umbrella are IT, distance learning and the Teaching, Learning & Technology Center. All are busy helping faculty stay current with their technology issues and doing it very efficiently with the budgets that always seem to be more limited than one would wish.

**Standard Six: Governance and Administration**

Spokane Falls Community College has enjoyed the leadership of the same president since 2001 and same Vice President of Learning/Chief Academic Officer since 1998. While there has been a significant turnover among board members and throughout other administrative positions during this time, the leadership of the president and vice president of learning appears to have allowed the college to continue to progress in a stable manner.

The faculty, staff and administration report that there is a collegial relationship between employees and administration. Both groups report a feeling of trust that allows concerns and disputes to be resolved in a cooperative manner, rather than an adversarial manner. Students also report a positive relationship with the administration and a feeling that they have a voice in the college.

**Standard Seven: Finance**

Financial planning at the institution has been closely tied to the mission, roles and goals of the college since 2003 through the use of the Strategic Planning process. Budget requests are made through deans to the vice-presidents and are eventually forwarded to the President, Board (as necessary) and to other appropriate state agencies. Each budget request is matched to a college goal and requests are prioritized at the administrative level. At the request of the Community Colleges of Spokane Board the college has established a 5% reserve since the 2003 visit and appears to be well situated to continue to remain financially stable in the future. Overall, SFCC's budget has grown from $18,296,588 in 2003-2004 to $23,895,971 in 2008-2009.

**Standard Eight: Physical Resources**

Spokane Falls Community College has completed 14 major capital projects since 2003 totaling over $30 million.  The single largest item was the construction of a $20 million business and social science building.  Construction of this building also allowed for the demolition of two existing buildings and that site will be used for the construction of a new science building which will be bid in the spring of 2009.  Total projects slated to be bid in spring 2009 total more than $70 million and are slated to be completed by 2013.  All projects are tied to the SFCC master plan which is tied to the Strategic Planning process.

The District Office also reports some recent changes in agreements with SFCC and the other district institutions regarding freeing up district facilities staff to focus on regular maintenance rather than on renovation projects.  The hope is that this will better allow the District to focus its efforts on general maintenance issues.  Overall, the campus and facilities are attractive and appear to be well taken care of, and students and faculty report that they are adequate to meet their needs, or will soon be adequate when the planned buildings are constructed.

**Standard Nine: Institutional Integrity**

The college has continued to ensure that it is operating in a manner that meets the high ethical standards outlined in Standard Nine.

Students, faculty, administration and staff all report that the high ethical standards and the integrity of the institution are items that make Spokane Falls Community College a great place to work and to attend school.

**Commendations**

1. The college is commended for its institution-wide focus on student success. The attention given to meeting the needs of students is obvious at all levels of the college and the students report this attention as a major advantage of attending school at Spokane Falls Community College.

2. The college is commended for the climate of collegiality that exits between faculty in different disciplines, between faculty and administration, and for the renewed spirit of cooperation that exists between faculty at the Institute for Extended Learning and Spokane Falls Community College. There is a pervasive attitude of cooperation and focus on continuous improvement that exists at all levels of the institution.

**Recommendations**

None