

REPORT OF A FOCUSED VISIT  
TO  
THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT COLORADO SPRINGS  
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO  
MARCH 18-19, 2002  
  
FOR THE  
HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION  
OF THE  
NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

EVALUATION TEAM

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CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	3
II.	SOURCES AND LEVELS OF REVENUE.....	4
III.	ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.....	7
IV.	OVERSIGHT OF GRADUATE EDUCATION.....	9
V.	STRENGTHS AND CONCERNS.....	11
VI.	ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS.....	13
VII.	RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE.....	14

## INTRODUCTION

In its report on a comprehensive visit to the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS) in 1987, the NCA evaluating team recommended that NCA conduct a visit in 2001-2002 to focus on 1) sources and levels of revenue, 2) assessment of student academic achievement, and 3) graduate education. The team wrote that they "would expect the visiting team to find five years from now 1) a significant improvement in the University's financial resource base, 2) a functioning assessment program that has produced demonstrable improvements in instructional programs, and 3) an effective mechanism for monitoring the operation of graduate programs to assure comparability of requirements, compliance with University-wide regulations, and high exit expectations in masters and doctoral programs."

This report describes the team visit to the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs on March 18-19, 2002 as required on the Statement of Affiliation Status. Prior to the site visit, the team received from UCCS a Self Study report addressing the Concerns of the 1997 NCA team that were the basis for this focused visit.

The Report prepared by UCCS in preparation for the Focused Team provided extensive information about changes in funding for the University in the five years since the comprehensive visit; about the reorganization of graduate education at UCCS and within the University of Colorado System; and the progress made by UCCS in the assessment of student achievement.

Members of the Team were able to meet with a wide variety of individuals to obtain information about the current budget and prospects for the future. Those interviewed included the Chancellor of UCCS, Vice President for Business and Finance for the University of Colorado, the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance for UCCS, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance, and members of the University Budget Advisory Committee which is composed of representatives of the

faculty, staff, students, and administration. Members of the Team discussed graduate education with the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research of the University of Colorado System, the Dean of the Graduate School, the other deans, and members of the Graduate Executive Committee. Members of the team discussed assessment of student achievement with the Assessment Coordinator, the Student Achievement and Assessment Committee (SAAC), the College Deans, the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the staffs of the Teaching and Learning Center and the Writing Center, and the chairs of departments at different accomplishment levels of assessment.

#### **SOURCES AND LEVELS OF REVENUE**

In recommending a focused visit to UCCS, the comprehensive team report in 1997 noted as a Concern that: "Many academic departments and administrative units are severely limited by the effects of chronic underfunding by the State of Colorado. This concern was noted by the NCA evaluating team that visited the campus in 1987, and the situation has not improved during the past decade."

In the body of its report in support of its Concern, the Comprehensive Team expressed concern about base budget funding, faculty and staff salary levels, over reliance on part-time faculty, and the adequacy of space both in quantity and quality.

The budget position of UCCS has improved significantly over the past years. The improvement is a result of several factors. First, the University of Colorado system has adjusted the funding formula for resident students to provide equalization of funding per FTE for additional students at all of its campuses. However, UCCS still does not receive equal funding with the other campuses of the University for its historical base of students. Were equalization applied to the historical base of students, UCCS would

receive an additional several million dollars in state appropriated funds which would go a long way to address some of the budgetary issues which continue to face the campus.

The second reason that UCCS's funding has improved results from its ability to increase the number of non-resident students. While UCCS does not receive state appropriated funds for non-resident students, its out-of-state tuition is approximately four times the resident tuition level, and greater than the marginal cost of serving these students. Increased non-resident enrollment from 231 FTE in FY96 to 384.5 FTE in FY01 netted the campus nearly an additional \$2.0M in FY01.

The third reason for increased funding for UCCS is the good performance of the campus on the various factors considered by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education in its Quality Indicator System. For FY02, the campus received over \$338k for its performance on factors such as persistence and graduation rates, undergraduate class size, institutional support costs, and minority persistence and graduation rates.

Finally, the budget situation at UCCS has been helped by a comparative analysis of UCCS's funding with designated peer institutions. These peer institutions are "stretch" institutions for UCCS, and provide a favorable basis for funding since UCCS is at about 85% of its peers. The use of "stretch" peers for UCCS is consistent with the campus having been designated as the "growth" campus within the University of Colorado system.

Despite the gains of recent years, UCCS is still not funded appropriately. As noted above, it is funded at only approximately 85% of the level enjoyed by its peers. While UCCS's budget from state appropriations and tuition has increased by 46.6% from FY96 to FY01, its resident enrollment increased by 24.1% during that period. During that same period, inflation eroded the budgetary increase by approximately 15% nationally and about 22% in Colorado, leaving a relatively small real gain in funds. On

the other hand, since the basic infrastructure of the campus was in place in FY96, the incremental funds could be and were devoted to the instructional mission.

The budget outlook for UCCS for FY03 is relatively good, particularly compared to what is happening in most states. Budget reductions in FY02 of approximately 3% will be carried as base budget reductions into FY03. However, the University expects that increases for enrollment growth, performance funding, adjustments for peer comparisons, and across-the-board base increases should result in about a 3.0% to 3.5% increase in its appropriation for next year. In addition, UCCS will benefit from a tuition increase of approximately 9.0%.

UCCS has made progress in addressing the concern of the Comprehensive Team about the reliance on part-time faculty. Despite an enrollment growth in excess of 24% since FY97, the percentage of courses taught by part-time faculty declined from 29% in FY97 to 22% in FY01. UCCS's reliance on part-time faculty compares favorably with its fourteen peer institutions that have an average of 27% of their FTE faculty employed part-time compared to 25% at UCCS.

Since the comprehensive visit in 1997, the campus has developed a budgeting system that seems to be working well. That system uses a combination of "top down" and "bottom up" budgeting that is well understood by the campus community. In addition to being understood by administrators, the system is well understood by the University Budget Advisory Committee. This Committee, with representatives of faculty, staff, students, and administrators, reviews all budget requests and makes recommendations to the Chancellor. Its recommendations are generally followed, and the Committee serves the University well both as a means of seeking advice from its various constituencies, but also in providing communication with those constituencies and keeping the budget process open and transparent.

USSC has made significant progress in acquiring and improving space for its programs. Since the comprehensive visit, it has added Columbine Hall with 107,532 gsf (gross square footage) of space, an addition to the library with over 98,000 gsf of space, and a Family Development Center with 11,871 gsf of space. During that period it was also able to remodel several buildings to improve the quality of space available. The campus also added over 186,000 gsf for student housing, which has been very helpful in attracting non-resident students and the tuition income that those students bring. The administration is in the process of purchasing, through the University of Colorado Foundation, a building near campus that could be used to house its nursing programs.

Unfortunately, the downturn in the economy has caused the State of Colorado to significantly curtail capital expenditures. Several UCCS projects are now delayed, pending an improvement in the state's revenue flow.

### **ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

The comprehensive team report in 1997 cited student assessment as a concern. Specifically, the report stated that "[d]espite progress during the past year in formulating a plan to assess student academic achievement and in carrying out that plan, assessment is spotty at the undergraduate and graduate levels. A plan to assess general education is still in the development stage." The visiting team specifically recommended that the university put resources into the development of a "functioning assessment program that has produced demonstrable improvements in instructional programs." This was to have been completed prior to a focused visit scheduled for the 2001-2002 academic year.

Since 1997, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs has made several noteworthy advances toward addressing their previously mentioned deficiencies in the area of student assessment. A full-time Assessment Coordinator has been hired to

consult with and provide assistance to faculty involved with assessment efforts. Specifically, the position is primarily supporting the administration of student assessment surveys tailored to specific program assessment needs. The Student Achievement Assessment Committee (SAAC), representing disciplines and units from across the institution, has been active in conducting an annual review of all academic programs to determine which are meeting expectations and which still need assistance in developing appropriate assessment measures. Based upon the recommendation of the SAAC, the Office of Institutional Research designed a template for reporting assessment progress, which all programs use to record their assessment efforts. The template covers assessment efforts in four areas: (1) assessment goals; (2) assessment measures and techniques being used; (3) summation of previous data and findings; and (4) a review of curricular/program changes made in response to assessment results. The Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs has made outcomes assessment an expected component of the program review process and has provided rewards for those determined to be exceptional. As a result of all of the above efforts, faculty have clearly communicated about assessment initiatives, and an assessment culture is slowly beginning to develop on the campus.

Further evidence of the strides made in the area of assessment occurred during the fall of 2001 when all 46 academic units required to submit an assessment report did so. Of these, 31 (67%) were determined by the SAAC to have fully acceptable assessment efforts. An additional 12 (26%) were evaluated as being in the process of implementing acceptable assessment plans. Only 3 programs (7%) were determined to be at the beginning stages of assessment; most of the programs classified as such were either new or in the process of being re-organized.

The assessment of general education has been stalled somewhat by the expected impending legislative mandate of a statewide general education core. Despite



this complication, the faculty assembly at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs has approved the following four core goals for general education: (1) students will be able to read, write, listen and speak in a manner that demonstrates critical, analytical and creative thought; (2) students will achieve a depth of understanding in their majors and a breadth of experience in other fields; (3) students will understand and apply the tools and methodologies used to obtain knowledge; (4) students will be prepared to participate as responsible members of a pluralistic society—locally, nationally, and globally. In response to these campus goals, a general education assessment plan has been developed, and baseline data are being collected. The use of the writing portfolio to assess, in part, students' general education core competencies and the use of a nationally-normed instrument, such as Academic Profile from ETS, strengthen this assessment effort.

### **OVERSIGHT OF GRADUATE EDUCATION**

The 1997 Comprehensive Team noted as a Concern that: "The University is giving minimal attention to the administration of its graduate programs. There is insufficient monitoring above the program level to assure high quality in the admission of graduate students, in the conduct of graduate programs, and in the procedures and standards for awarding graduate degrees. These problems assume special importance given 1) plans to diminish the University of Colorado System's role in monitoring quality in the administration of graduate programs and 2) the growing ambitions of UCCS at the doctoral level and in distance education."

At the time of the Comprehensive Visit in 1997, the administration of graduate education at UCCS and throughout the University of Colorado System was undergoing dramatic restructuring. Prior to that time, there was one Graduate School for the entire University housed in the System office in Boulder, although there was a person based in

Colorado Springs with dual reporting to the System and the campus. The old system was cumbersome and bureaucratic. For example, all appointments to the Graduate School faculty had to be processed through the System office in Boulder. Thus the President's Office decided to decentralize the Graduate School to give autonomy to the campuses.

When the Team visited in 1997, the decision to decentralize had been made, but the processes to manage graduate education at UCCS had not yet been developed. Those processes are now in place. The campus has developed Graduate School Policies and Procedures comparable to those used at most American universities engaged in graduate education. In addition, the graduate programs in business and education, which previously were outside the control of the Graduate School, are now under its jurisdiction and subject to the same reviews and procedures as all other graduate programs.

The Graduate School is currently administered by a person with a broad background in graduate education, having served in several doctoral granting institutions. The Graduate Dean is supported by a Graduate School Executive Committee. Together, they are responsible, under the provisions of the School's Policies and Procedures, for oversight for graduate education.

## STRENGTHS AND CONCERNS

### *Strengths*

The University Budget Advisory Committee is functioning well in seeking budget advice and in keeping the campus informed about budget matters.

The university has a structured approach to assessment efforts as represented through the integrated work of the Office of Institutional Research, the position of the Assessment Coordinator, and the Student Academic Achievement Committee and supported by the office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

General education core competencies are assessed by the use of the writing portfolio. The portfolio project is capably directed by a faculty member with a Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition. Readers of student portfolios are carefully trained faculty members. Multiple options exist for students whose portfolios demonstrate the need for supplemental writing instruction.

The current director of the Center for Teaching and Learning clearly understands the multi-tiered approach to assessment: program evaluation, course review, and student learning outcomes assessment. His knowledge of assessment and his vision of future activities to support the use of assessment data to impact student learning should be utilized.

### *Concerns*

Despite the adoption of the four general education core competencies, the various colleges of the university do not share a common general education core. This lack of a common core makes assessment more difficult. The assessment of general education core competencies that is occurring on campus has not yet impacted the curriculum in a significant way.

Assessment efforts throughout the campus remain at the academic program level and have not yet systematically moved to the level of student learning outcomes.

The assessment of student academic achievement is not uniformly implemented across all academic units, undergraduate, graduate, and professional. Some programs are more advanced than others. UCCS has made progress and has shown a commitment to continue making progress, but there is still significant work that has yet to be done.

Too much reliance is currently being placed on self-reporting by students. For many programs, assessment results rely far too heavily on the inordinate number of surveys completed by students. These self-reporting measures may provide a small piece of the assessment data, but should not be relied on as heavily as they currently are across the campus. Direct measures of student learning are expected.

Despite the time required to administer and implement the writing portfolio assessment, the director of the project receives only one course of release time per year for this administrative assignment. The amount of time required to adequately oversee a project of this scope (and one which will only increase in size) requires additional release time for the project director.

## **ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS**

The position of Assessment Coordinator should be re-assigned from the Office of Institutional Research to the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC). This re-assignment would correspond to the coordinator's current physical location, complement the work of the TLC, and send a message about the necessity of assessment initiatives being tied to student learning outcomes that is lacking throughout the campus.

More resources need to be available for current assessment initiatives. Specifically, the university needs to provide additional release time for the director of the writing portfolio project, including an adequate summer stipend so that appropriate compensation is given for the workload required of a project of this magnitude. The director also needs an adequate budget to use for hiring faculty to assist in the scoring process. Funds need to be made available, perhaps through the TLC, for assessment projects initiated by faculty. Such a pool of money, even if modest in amount, would provide the incentive for faculty to apply for grants for innovative assessment ideas.

Faculty need to believe that assessment efforts will be rewarded. Currently, this feeling is not evident on campus.

## RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE

The Team's recommendation for the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs is that the next comprehensive visit be held in 2006-2007. The expectation of the Team is that at the next comprehensive visit, there will be evidence that the institution will have implemented a level of assessment of student achievement that focuses on the direct assessment of student learning outcomes and will have implemented assessment of the general education goals and learning outcomes identified by the institution.

The funding base of the university has improved, but despite the gains of recent years, UCCS is not funded appropriately. That UCCS is funded at only approximately 85% of the level enjoyed by its peers points to the need to obtain equalization on its historical base-budget allocation. Since UCCS has been designated as a "growth" campus, the incremental funding to support growth is now provided at the same level as its sister University of Colorado campuses, which should serve to improve comparatively the unit funding level per FTE as the institution grows.

The administration and governance of graduate education at UCCS is comparable to many American universities. At the time of the last comprehensive visit, the governance of graduate education was in transition from a central structure in the University of Colorado system to a local structure at each of the campuses. That transition is complete.

## WORKSHEET FOR STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

INSTITUTION: UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT COLORADO SPRINGS  
P.O. Box 7150; 1420 Austin Bluffs Parkwa  
Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7150

TYPE OF REVIEW: A visit focused on 1) sources and levels of revenue, 2) assessment of student academic achievement, and 3) graduate education

DATE OF THIS REVIEW: March 18, 2002 — March 19, 2002

COMMISSION ACTION:

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STATUS: *Accredited (1970- .)*

<u>Institution</u>	<i>Recommended Wording:</i>	RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING
<u>Team</u>	<i>Recommended Wording:</i>	RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

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HIGHEST DEGREE AWARDED: *Doctor's.*

<u>Institution</u>	<i>Recommended Wording:</i>	RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING
<u>Team</u>	<i>Recommended Wording:</i>	RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

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MOST RECENT ACTION: *November 13, 1998.*

TO BE CHANGED BY THE COMMISSION OFFICE

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STIPULATIONS ON AFFILIATION STATUS: *Accreditation at the doctoral level is limited to the programs in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science; and programs offered by distance delivery are limited to the MBA and MPA.*

<u>Institution</u>	<i>Recommended Wording:</i>	RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING
<u>Team</u>	<i>Recommended Wording:</i>	RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

NEW DEGREE

SITES:

*Prior Commission approval required.*

Institution

*Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

Team

*Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

PROGRESS REPORTS

REQUIRED:

*None.*

Team

*Recommended Wording:* NONE.

MONITORING REPORTS

REQUIRED:

*None.*

Team

*Recommended Wording:* NONE.

CONTINGENCY REPORTS

REQUIRED:

*None.*

Team

*Recommended Wording:* NONE.

OTHER VISITS

REQUIRED:

*March 18, 2002; A visit focused on 1) sources and levels of revenue, 2) assessment of student academic achievement, and 3) graduate education.*

Team

*Recommended Wording:* NONE.

LAST COMPREHENSIVE

EVALUATION:

*1996-97.*

TO BE CHANGED BY THE COMMISSION OFFICE

NEXT COMPREHENSIVE

EVALUATION:

*2006-07.*

Team

*Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL DATES