



December 14, 2006

TO: President Jay Helman,
Western State College of Colorado

FROM: Karen J. Solomon, Assistant Director for Accreditation Services

SUBJECT: Final Team Report

Enclosed is the institution's copy of the final Team Report of a visit to Western State College of Colorado. The Commission encourages you to make additional copies of the Team Report to circulate to your constituencies. In addition, I have attached draft copies of the Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) and the Organizational Profile (OP). These two documents, the SAS and the OP, will be posted on the Commission website after the Board of Trustees validates the accreditation decision of the Institutional Actions Council or the Review Committee. They are enclosed now for your information and for your review. You will receive an official action letter, an SAS and an OP following validation of the action by the Board of Trustees.

You are asked to acknowledge receipt of the Team Report and the SAS and OP worksheets; and to file on behalf of your institution, a formal written response to the evaluation team's report and recommendation. Your response becomes a part of the official record of the evaluation visit. Your response also serves as an integral part of the evaluation process, and it will be included in the materials sent to the next team that visits your institution. Please send your institutional response to me **two weeks** after you receive this report, send copies to members of the visiting team, and set aside some additional copies for the Commission's review process. (See *Handbook of Accreditation, Third Edition, Chapter 2.2-2*)

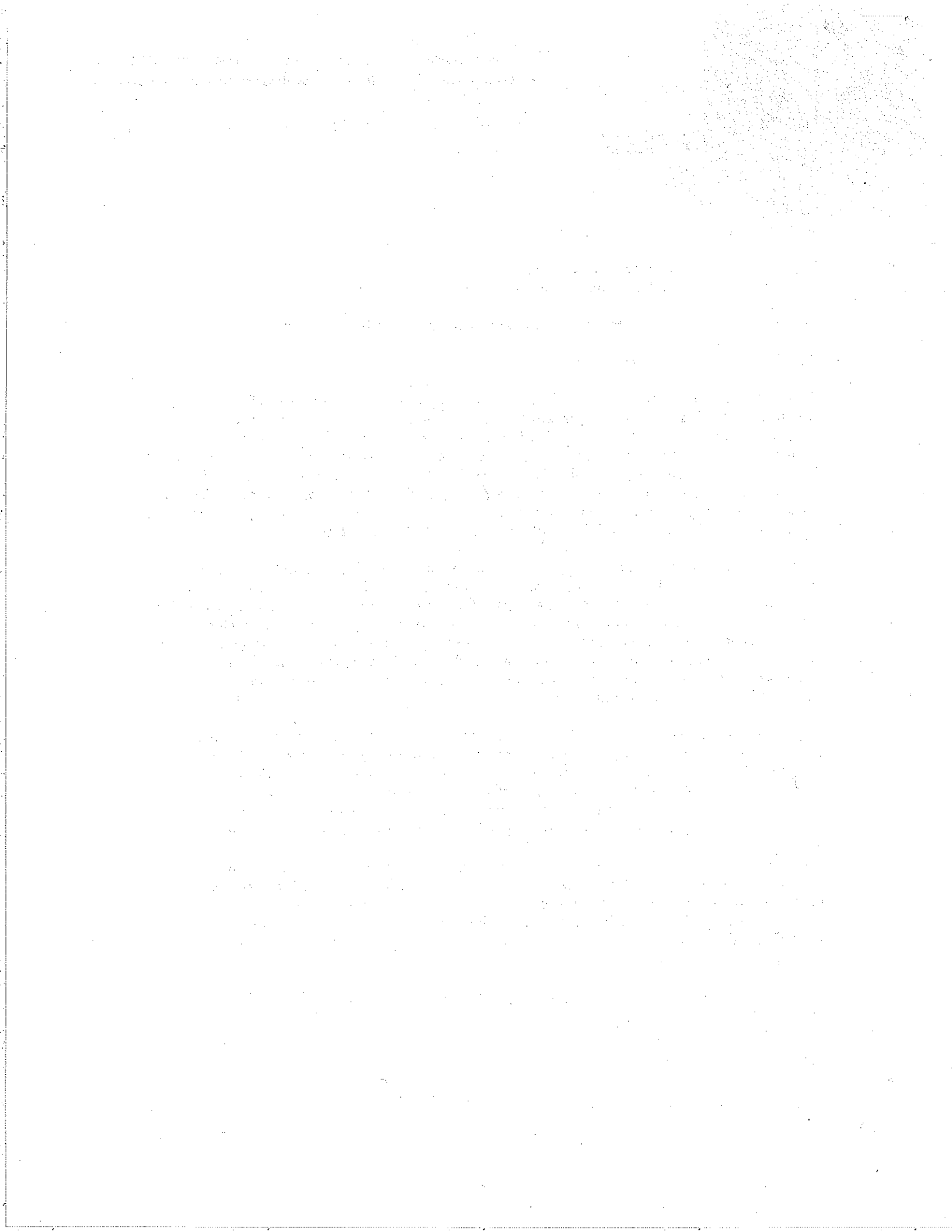
In your response, you are also asked to let me know which review option you prefer: the Readers Panel or the Review Committee. A description of these processes appears in the *Handbook, Chapter 2.2-2 and 2.2-3*. Please review these options and advise me as soon as possible, whether you agree essentially with the team's report and recommendation and therefore choose the Readers Panel, or whether you wish to have the team's report and your materials examined by a Review Committee. The next Review Committee meeting is January 22, 2007, in Chicago.

Enclosed please find three evaluation forms. In an effort to strengthen its professional development program for Peer Reviewers, the Commission is initiating this structured method outside of the institution's formal written response to seek from the institution an evaluation of the team. We recommend that you distribute these to knowledgeable people representative of several constituencies at your institution. You can make additional copies if you wish. Your participation is voluntary but greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions concerning the evaluation team's report, the SAS, the OP or the review options, please let me know.

Enclosures

cc: Dr. Donald M. Bird, Team Chairperson



**REPORT OF A
COMMISSION-MANDATED FOCUSED VISIT**

Assurance Section

TO

**Western State College of Colorado
Gunnison, Colorado**

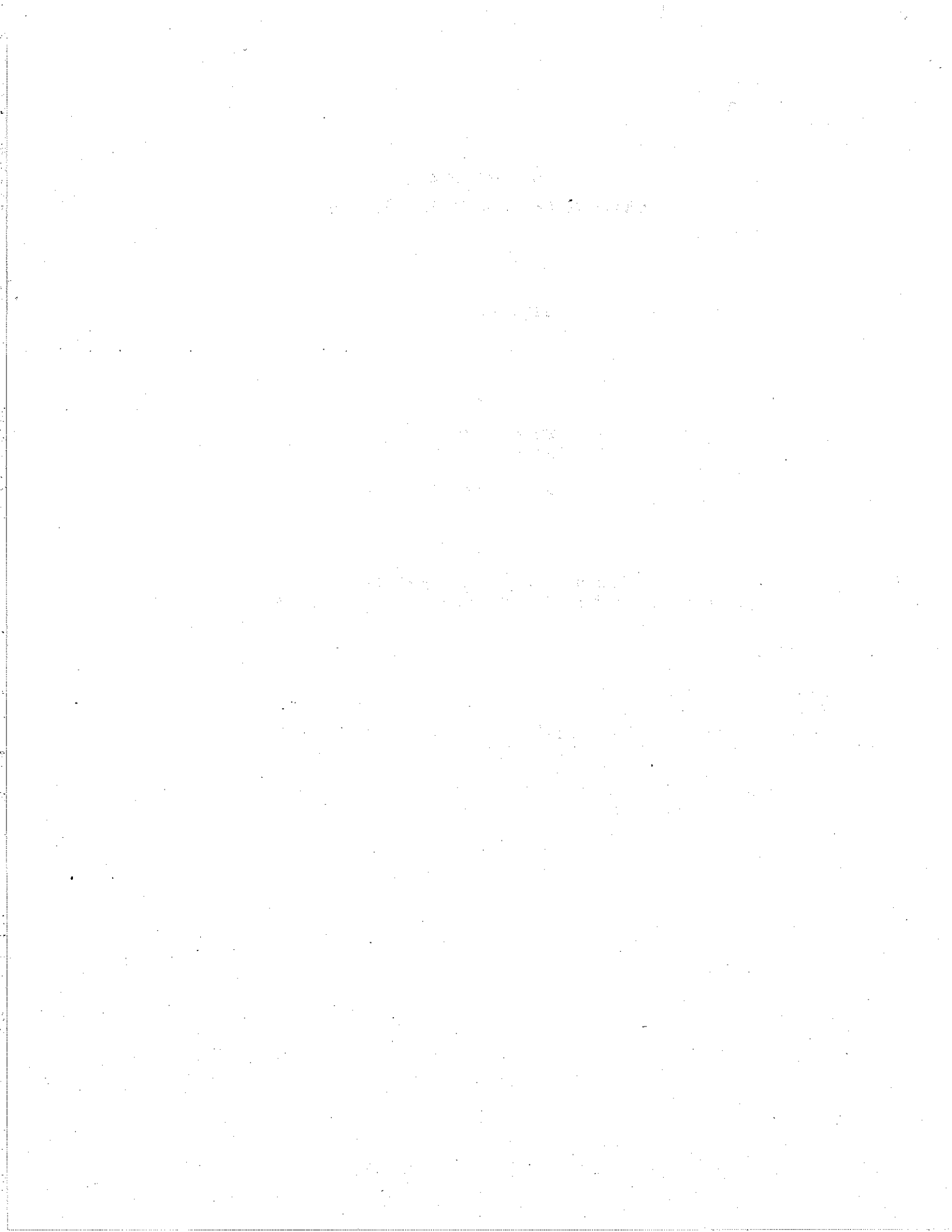
16-17 October 2006

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

Dr. Donald M. Bird, Professor of Chemistry, United States Air Force Academy
USAF Academy, CO 80840-6230 (Chair)

Dr. Michael G. Walraven, Professor of Psychology, Jackson Community College,
Jackson, MI 49201

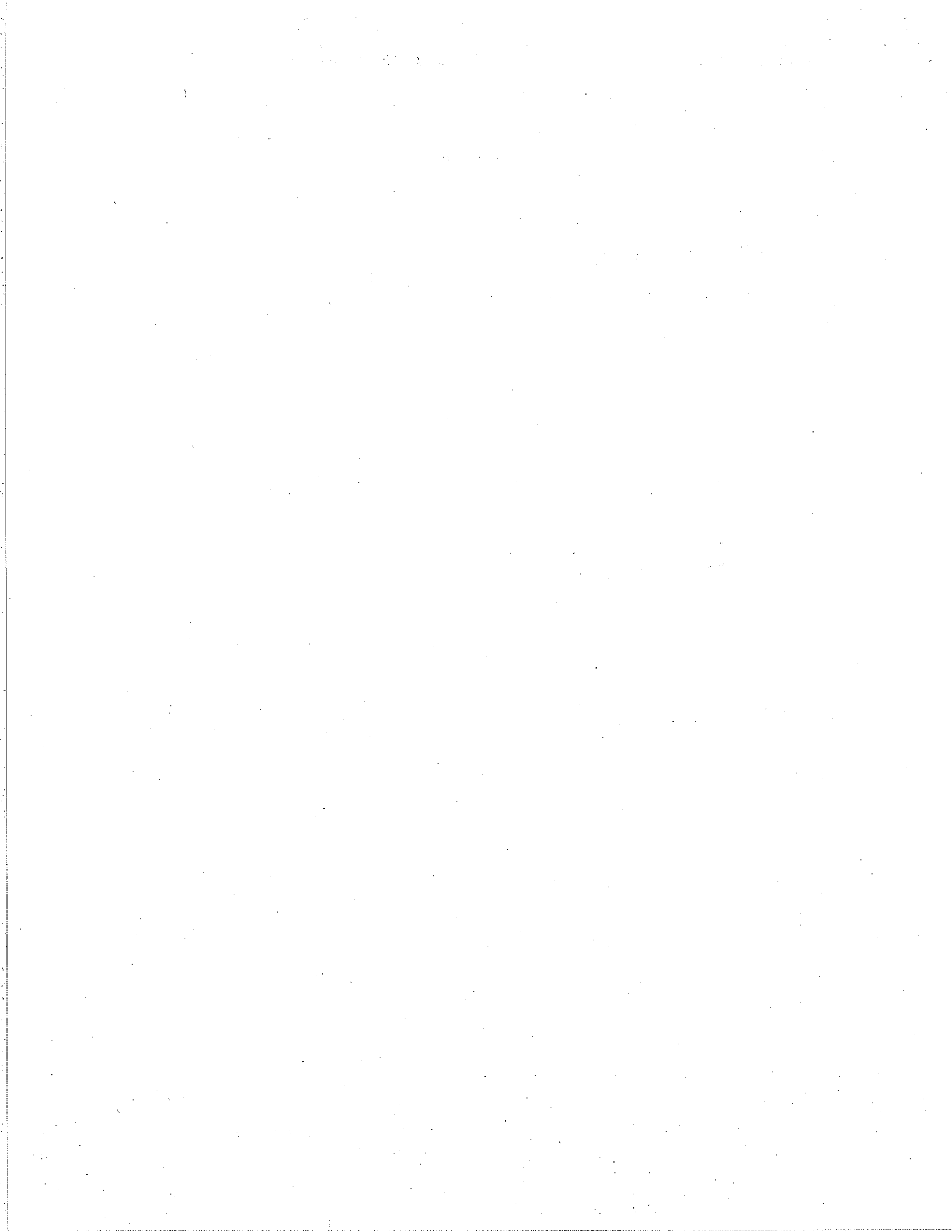


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I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT**A. Purpose of Visit**

The purpose of this visit was to conduct a focused visit on assessment of student learning. The team which conducted the comprehensive evaluation visit in 2003 noted that there was no infrastructure supporting assessment and that there was no institutional commitment to the culture of assessment. The HLC staff evaluation of the 2004 progress report on general education noted the need for the College to identify if students are achieving learning outcomes, and that it document that learning is occurring and that assessment is being used to make improvements.

B. Accreditation Status

Western State College of Colorado (WSCC) has been accredited since 1915. The last accreditation comprehensive visit was conducted 27-29 January 2003 and the next comprehensive visit is scheduled for 2012-2013.

C. Organizational Context

Since the comprehensive visit in January of 2003, WSCC has made dramatic progress in the development of an assessment culture and the implementation of a comprehensive assessment program. With strong administration support, the WSCC assessment committee has encouraged and guided assessment at all levels of the institution, from the hiring process to the development of course-level, programmatic, and general education assessments which they have then used to improve their courses and programs.

D. Unique Aspects of Visit

None.

E. Interactions with Organizational Constituencies

1. President, WSCC
2. Vice-President for Institutional Advancement
3. Vice-President for Finance and Administration
4. Vice-President for Academic Affairs
5. Associate Vice-President for Academic Affairs
6. Associate Vice-President for Academic Affairs Assessment
7. Institutional Research
8. Chair of Business, Accounting and Economics
9. Chair of Behavioral and Social Sciences
10. Two faculty members from Business Administration
11. Faculty member from Philosophy
12. Faculty member from Psychology
13. Chair of Communication Arts, Languages, and Literature
14. Chair of Natural and Environmental Sciences

15. Faculty member from Communication and Theatre
16. Faculty member from English
17. Faculty member from Chemistry (also assessment committee chair)
18. Faculty and assessment committee member from Exercise and Sports Science
19. Faculty and assessment committee member from Sociology
20. Faculty and assessment committee member from History
21. Faculty and assessment committee member from Communication and Theater
22. Assessment committee member from the Library

F. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed

1. Focused Assessment Visit Report
2. WSCC Catalog
3. WSCC Handbook for Professional Personnel
4. WSCC 2004 Financial and Compliance Audit
5. WSCC 2005 Financial and Compliance Audit
6. Discipline Assessment Plans 2003-2004
7. Discipline Assessment Plans 2004-2005
8. Discipline Assessment Plans 2005-2006
9. Accounting Education Discipline Assessment Plans
10. General Education Goals Assessment 2003-2004
11. General Education Goals Assessment 2004-2005
12. General Education Goals Assessment 2005-2006
13. Assessment Compilation 2005-2006, Volume I
14. Assessment Compilation 2005-2006, Volume II
15. Assessment Compilation 2004-2005, Volume I
16. Assessment Compilation 2004-2005, Volume II
17. WSCC Institutional Snapshot
18. General Education Report Submitted to The Higher Learning Commission
19. General Education Goals Assessment 2003-2004
20. General Education Goals Assessment 2004-2005
21. General Education Goals Assessment 2005-2006
22. Academic Assessment Plan and Student Affairs Assessment Plan 2003
23. Senior Exit Survey
24. <http://www.western.edu/academics/index.html>
25. <http://www.western.edu/acadaff/faculty.html>
26. <http://www.western.edu/acadaff/wsc/assessment/Welcome.html>
27. <http://www.western.edu/teachxl/Welcome.html>

II. AREA OF FOCUS

A. Statement of Focus

This visit focused on the program of assessment at WSCC. Both programmatic and general education assessment were evaluated with the expectation that WSCC use appropriate feedback loops to improve student learning.

B. Statements of Evidence

- **Evidence that demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.**

1. WSCC has made significant strides in its assessment programs since the comprehensive visit in 2003. An active and effective Assessment Committee positively engages faculty regarding assessment. The Committee conducts a comprehensive review of each course and program assessment plan, provides written feedback on the plan with suggestions for improvement, and follows up to determine how the assessment has been used to improve student learning. Additionally, the Assessment Committee identifies best practices and makes those available electronically for the entire faculty. WSCC has also appointed an Associate Vice-President for Academic Affairs Assessment. This appointment along with financial support for assessment training and education has given consistent direction and support for WSCC assessment efforts.

2. Faculty across WSCC have embraced the culture of assessment. Faculty routinely discuss, both formally and informally, assessment successes and failures. They work together to develop and fine-tune assessment instruments tailored to the objectives of courses and programs. This effort has resulted in closing the feedback loop by making numerous programmatic changes such as those documented in Appendix 6 of the Self Study for the Departments of Art; Behavioral and Social Sciences; Business, Accounting, and Economics; Communication Arts, Languages, and Literature; Mathematics and Computer Information Science; Music; Natural and Environmental Sciences; Recreation and Exercise and Sport Science; and the Teacher Education Program.

3. While the assessment committee has made great strides to assist individual faculty members and departments to design effective assessment plans and strategies, they have also established the essential cultural conditions for sharing assessment results more broadly throughout the academic community and, as part of the evidence for institutional effectiveness, with external stakeholders as well. For example, the faculty trustee presents an assessment report to the trustees at the end of each semester, the assessment committee presents an assessment report to the entire WSCC campus, and the VP of Development and the WSCC Foundation regularly shares assessment results during fund-raising activities with alumni. At the same time, the establishment of critical administrative infrastructure has set the stage for next steps, including the connection between assessment and budget allocations. It should be noted that the connection between assessment and planning is already functioning through the mechanism of program review.

4. Department Chairs noted that maintaining the assessment culture and continued improvement of assessment to focus on student learning has even impacted the hiring process. More than one Chair identified a hire

within the past three years which was made with the goal of improving a given department's assessment efforts.

5. The assessment rubric for the second writing course in General Education is impressive. The faculty are commended for developing comprehensive and objective measurements of writing ability which serve as an excellent example of direct measurement in the General Education program.

6. The new faculty orientation program explains to new faculty the rationale and objectives of General Education, the assessment goals of that program, and how each faculty member fits into the assessment of both the General Education and majors programs.

- **Evidence that demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.**

1. While WSCC has made significant strides in all of its assessment programs, the primary General Education assessment is a student survey which frequently does not receive proper attention from the students, is an indirect measurement, and does not gather the information needed to determine what the students learn and what should be changed to improve the General Education courses. The assessment committee and General Education faculty recognize this deficiency and are actively engaged in the process of developing direct assessment instruments which will collectively improve the General Education program.

2. WSCC leadership has actively supported development of the positive assessment culture within its faculty. The leadership should institutionalize its commitment to assessment by including individual and campus-related assessment training and education in the annual budget.

- **Evidence that demonstrates that further organizational attention and Commission follow-up are required.**

None noted.

- **Evidence is insufficient and demonstrates that Commission sanction is warranted.**

None noted.

C. Recommendation of Team

- Evidence sufficiently demonstrated. No Commission follow-up recommended.

D. Rationale for the Team Recommendation

- All levels of WSCC embrace the culture of assessment and value the positive influence it has had on curriculum development and improvement of student learning. It is clear that WSCC knows how to use assessment, recognizes where there are gaps in the assessment program, and is committed to continuous improvement of assessment processes. The Team applauds the efforts of the past three years and fully expects that the positive momentum will continue to nurture assessment at all levels as WSCC continues to develop new and effective measures and use the data to effect learning-focused curricular and programmatic changes which will benefit all WSCC students.

E. Other Accreditation Issues

None noted.

III. STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS**A. Affiliation Status**

No change.

B. Nature of Organization**1. Legal status**

No change.

2. Degrees awarded

No change.

C. Conditions of Affiliation**1. Stipulation on affiliation status**

No change.

2. Approval of degree sites

No change.

3. Approval of distance education degree

No change.

4. Reports required

None.

5. Other Visits Scheduled:

None.

D. Commission Sanction or Adverse Action

No change.

E. Summary of Commission Review

No change.

REPORT OF A COMMISSION-MANDATED FOCUSED VISIT

Advancement Section

TO

**Western State College of Colorado
Gunnison, Colorado**

16-17 October 2006

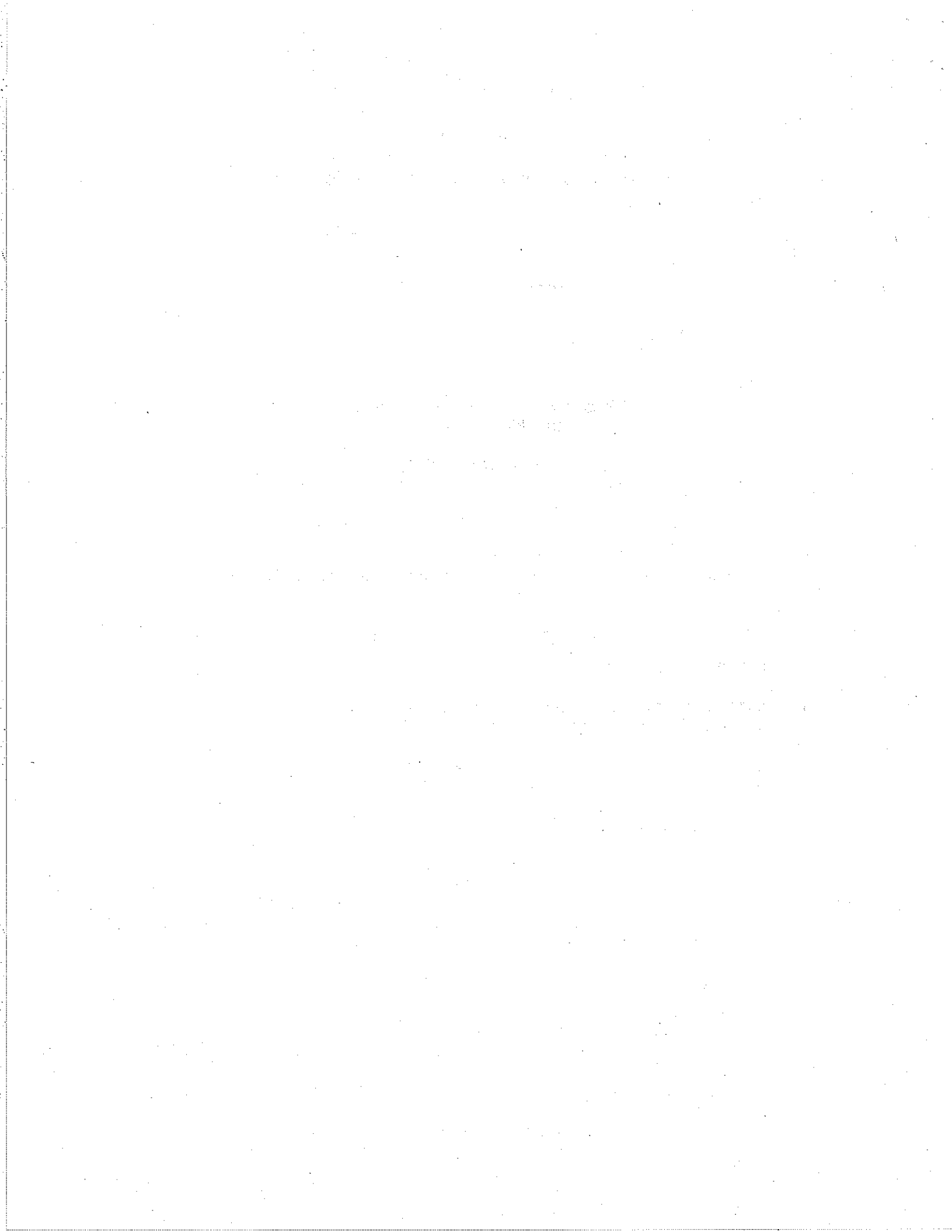
The Higher Learning Commission

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Colorado Springs, CO 80840-6230 (Chair)

Dr. Michael G. Walraven, Professor of Psychology, Jackson Community College,
Jackson, MI 49201



ADVANCEMENT SECTION**CONSULTATION OF TEAM****A. Observations of Team Regarding Area of Focus**

1. This focused visit was recommended by the team who conducted a comprehensive evaluation visit in January of 2003. That team observed significant deficits in the College's infrastructure to support, understanding of, and commitment to systematic assessment of student learning.
2. The current team observes dramatic progress on the part of the college toward the remedy of these deficits. A functioning infrastructure is evident and evolving, there is widespread understanding of the nature and purposes of assessment, and the commitment of the college's faculty and administration to further advances in assessment design, methodology, and data utilization is laudable. Indeed, the on-campus interviews, meetings, and written resources provide evidence that assessment has developed to a greater extent and degree than the self-study would suggest.
3. The vast majority of faculty is engaged in assessment, often at both course and program levels. While there are a number of potential obstacles yet to be surmounted, the college is well on its way to a fully functional assessment experience.
4. The team was impressed that the college has undertaken assessment at several levels simultaneously: course, general education, and program, a daunting strategy. The team was also impressed with the breadth of deployment of assessment planning and data collection, as well as the depth of understanding of, and observable passion for, the promise of assessment to improve student learning. In our opinion, Western is fortunate to have such committed faculty and administrators.
5. The team also observed that in many areas there are remaining hurdles, particularly the replacement of indirect measures of student learning with direct measures, the need to develop measurable statements of expected learning outcomes, and increasing comfort with data reduction, representation, and utilization. Primarily in these areas, the team offers its consultations.

B. Consultations of Team.

1. The college has among its current employees a rich expertise in the design of learning outcomes and associated strategies for measurement (rubrics). Several disciplines have already developed assessment plans and measurement strategies which serve as examples of best practices for other faculty members. The assessment committee is commended for maintaining a patient insistence on flexibility of planning, and on the importance of plans tailored to the individual departments and programs. We encourage them to continue their outreach efforts, to extend the sharing of best practices more openly and more broadly, particularly those examples of multiple direct measures of clearly operationalized learning goals. At the same time, we encourage the college to recognize its indigenous talent and redirect those resources in support of assessment efforts wherever feasible.

2. It is a truism that no organization will ever have sufficient time, funds, or personnel to fully achieve its mission. When it comes to assessment, we encourage the college to allocate and earmark for this purpose, additional resources for professional development of faculty (and, where appropriate, administrators) so that all those involved will have a more complete understanding of the essential role of assessment in improving student learning. Both philosophical and methodological competencies should be addressed in this much-needed endeavor to bring all faculty to a level of fluency in assessment. Visits by recognized authorities with demonstrated histories of success, coupled with travel to specialized learning opportunities as needed, will ensure that no professor is left behind in this vital, albeit yet-emerging, aspect of professional competency.

3. The team understands that the orientation of new faculty members includes a brief presentation of the college's commitment to assessment, and a referral to the department chair for specific orientation to the expectations that course and program assessment are essential components of faculty work. In order to extend this acculturation effort, the team suggests the college consider a formal program of mentoring of new faculty, in which the newly-developed culture of effective assessment is shared.

4. Inasmuch as student learning is an essential component of the college mission, the college should consider carefully the role of assessment in its reports documenting institutional effectiveness for both internal and external stakeholders. While assessment data reflecting the rate of student success in individual courses may not be relevant for some audiences, trends of increasing student success in various programs will become both essential elements of program review and evaluation, and evidence of institutional effectiveness of interest to stakeholders at many levels. As has been clearly seen in many areas of the country, documentation of successful learning, and particularly systematic improvements and gains in student learning, often quiet public demands for unrealistic requirements.

5. Many excellent examples of successful assessment plans, learning outcome definitions, measurement strategies, and evaluation rubrics exist at colleges throughout the world. The college's faculty and administrators may want to explore these best practices, and adapt or adopt those suited to Western's mission, culture, and programs.

6. To sustain energy and commitment to assessment, organizations need to share their successes as well as their disappointments. Such sharing by faculty, both within and across disciplines, has several benefits, including supporting creativity in course improvement, which often results in further improvement in student learning. In addition, celebrations of successful accomplishment of planning, data collection, course and program improvements, and the resulting validation of the consequential improvement in student learning, strengthen the culture of assessment. The team encourages the college to celebrate its achievements to date, and to pause frequently to reflect and celebrate as the college continues its developmental course of assessment.

Team Recommendations for the
STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

INSTITUTION and STATE: Western State College of Colorado, CO

TYPE OF REVIEW (from ESS): Focused Visit

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW: A visit focused on assessment of student learning.

DATES OF REVIEW: 10/16/06 - 10/17/06

Nature of Organization

LEGAL STATUS: Public

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: n/c

DEGREES AWARDED: B

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: n/c

Conditions of Affiliation

STIPULATIONS ON AFFILIATION STATUS: None

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: n/c

APPROVAL OF NEW DEGREE SITES: Prior Commission approval required.

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: n/c

APPROVAL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION DEGREES: Prior Commission approval required.

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: n/c

REPORTS REQUIRED: None

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: n/c

OTHER VISITS REQUIRED: Focused Visit: 2006 - 2007; A visit focused on assessment of student learning.

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: None

Summary of Commission Review

YEAR OF LAST COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION: 2002 - 2003

YEAR OF NEXT COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION: 2012 - 2013

Team Recommendations for the
STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: n/c

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

INSTITUTION and STATE: Western State College of Colorado, CO

TYPE OF REVIEW:

Educational Programs

		Program Distribution	Recommended Change (+ or -)
Programs leading to Undergraduate	Associate	0	
	Bachelors	23	
Programs leading to Graduate	Masters	0	
	Specialist	0	
	First Professional	0	
	Doctoral	0	

Off-Campus Activities

In-State: Present Activity: Recommended Change:
(+ or -)

Campuses: None
Sites: None
Course Locations: None

Out-of-State: Present Wording: Recommended Change:
(+ or -)

Campuses: None
Sites: None
Course Locations: None

Out-of-USA: Present Wording: Recommended Change:
(+ or -)

Campuses: None
Sites: None
Course Locations: None

Distance Education Certificate and Degree Offerings:

Present Offerings:

Endorsement: Linguistically Diverse offered via Internet; Licensure Program: Teach Now Alternative offered via Internet

Recommended Change:

(+ or -)

STANDARD CURRICULAR STANDARDS

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