# Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (Year 7)

# Peer-Evaluation Report

**Southern Oregon University**

**Ashland, Oregon**

**October 23-25**

NWCCU Liaison to the Peer Evaluation Team:

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A confidential report of findings prepared for the

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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## I. Introduction

A five-person peer evaluation team conducted a Year Seven Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) visit to Southern Oregon University (SOU) from October 23 to October 25, 2023, in response to the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report submitted by the university to NWCCU on August 23, 2023. The comprehensive visit covered Standard One, and elements from Standard Two identified as needing follow-ups from the Year-Six Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR) report.

## II. Assessment of Self-Evaluation and Support Materials

Southern Oregon University submitted a generally well-written self-evaluation report covering Standard One as well as selected areas from Standard Two, as required from the Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR) evaluation report, though the peer evaluation team noted some areas were lacking in detail. Both the Standard One self-evaluation report and responses to the required PRFR standards provided important information about the history and status of the university.

## III. Visit Summary

The evaluation team conducted meetings with various members of SOU's community. These meetings included the President and Provost; members of the Board of Trustees; members of the "Super Cabinet"; Department Chairs; the Vice President for Finance and Administration; the Interim Assistant Vice President for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, and several other groups.

The evaluation team also attended open forums for faculty, staff (classified and unclassified), and students. General topics of discussion focused on the financial and organizational changes within SOU, university achievements, current initiatives, strategic university planning, and other opportunities for the university to achieve mission fulfillment. Turnout for all open forum sessions was generally very good, and participants in the open forums were candid, thoughtful, and engaged.

In discussion with faculty and students during the forum sessions, it was clearly evident to the peer evaluation team that faculty have a deep commitment to their students' mental health and academic progress. Students shared that they feel strongly that faculty care about them as people. Several students shared that they may not have been able to continue their studies without support from faculty mentors.

While some requests for follow-up materials were promptly supplied, there were several instances where documentation of standard compliance was neither available nor supplied. One example was the list of SOU's selected peer institutions.

*Concern: While many constituents were able to describe activities that support mission fulfillment, in several cases evidence of these activities was unable to be provided to the peer evaluation team.*

*Compliment: Faculty at SOU care deeply for the well-being and academic success of their students, which was echoed by the students themselves.*

**IV.** **Topics Addressed as an Addendum to the Self-Evaluation Report**

From the PRFR review, SOU addressed seven areas that were identified by the peer evaluation team as in need of improvement: 2.B.1, 2.B.2, 2.D.2, 2.D.3, 2.F.3, 2.F.4, and 2.G.6. Further detail is provided in the relevant standards within the body of this report.

**V.** **Standard 1: Student Success and Institutional Mission and Effectiveness**

a. Standard 1.A: Institutional Mission

  i. 1.A.1

*1.A.1 The institution's mission statement defines its broad educational purposes and its commitment to student learning and achievement.*

Southern Oregon University recognizes its importance as a regional partner in higher education and learning. Its mission statement provides a strong foundation for the institution's commitment to its students' learning outcomes, professional development, access, civic engagement, and sustainability within the region and throughout Oregon. SOU has a strong commitment to its students and the communities it serves. This support allows the institution to align regional workforce needs with the programs it offers and assist in identifying solutions to community-wide problems, such as sustainability.

b. Standard 1.B: Improving Institutional Effectiveness

  i. 1.B.1

*1.B.1 The institution demonstrates a continuous process to assess institutional effectiveness, including student learning and achievement and support services. The institution uses an ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement.*

SOU deploys an institutional effectiveness assessment model that depends on programs mapping their learning outcomes to the strategic plan. The peer evaluators found both in the self-study and through conversations with stakeholders that there are several weaknesses in this model, including some structural weaknesses within the systems used to track and compile these assessments.

The institution's utilization of the SOU Strategic Plan lacks a clear demonstration of effectiveness. Moreover, the existing plans, such as the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan and SOU Forward Plan, do not appear to be seamlessly integrated into and subordinate to the overarching SOU Strategic Plan. Consequently, it remains unclear whether resource allocation and realignment are appropriately linked to the strategic planning process, which is essential for facilitating continuous, systematic evaluation to inform and enhance the effectiveness of resource allocation, ultimately improving student learning and achievement.

*Concern: The institution's strategic plan, the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, and SOU Forward are not well integrated into one unified strategic plan.*

  ii. 1.B.2

*1.B.2 The institution sets and articulates meaningful goals, objectives, and*
*indicators of its goals to define mission fulfillment and to improve its effectiveness*
*in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions.*

The institution's framework for mission fulfillment lacks clarity and full development. Although the university has made commendable efforts to utilize technology for visualizing its progress in implementing the strategic plan, these efforts appear to be partially developed. Additionally, the institution lacks a formalized list of peer institutions for comparative purposes. These shortcomings raise concerns about the University's ability to effectively demonstrate the achievement of its mission.

*Concern: The mission fulfillment framework at SOU lacks clarity and detail.*

### iii. 1.B.3

*1.B.3 The institution provides evidence that its planning process is inclusive and*
*offers opportunities for comment by appropriate constituencies, allocates*
*necessary resources, and leads to improvement of institutional effectiveness.*

The institution has showcased its capacity for inclusive and transparent planning through various projects, with the "SOU Forward" program standing out as a prominent illustration. During the development of the "SOU Forward" program, the President consistently delivered timely updates to staff, faculty, and student stakeholders. These updates encompassed details about the budget reduction process and included explanations of the potential impacts on employees.

*Compliment: Many of the faculty and staff that the peer evaluation team met with*
*expressed that despite difficult decisions, particularly those surrounding reduction of the*
*workforce, their voices were heard by the President.*

### iv. 1.B.4

*1.B.4 The institution monitors its internal and external environments to identify*
*current and emerging patterns, trends, and expectations. Through its governance*
*system it considers such findings to assess its strategic position, define its future*
*direction, and review and revise, as necessary, its mission, planning, intended*
*outcomes of its programs and services, and indicators of achievement of its goals.*

SOU demonstrates through its ability to resolve its current budget challenges the ability to identify and project internal trends and expectations through multiple listening sessions, internal data collection and analysis, building regional employer relationships, and creating a substantial planning process.  This resulted in major planning and actions taken to attempt to resolve the shortfall. However, SOU does not maintain an established master list of peer institutions to compare itself to, which fails to support the need for consistency and the tracking of comparable trends over time.  Both in reading the self-study and in various conversations, the peer evaluators found that peer institutions are chosen as needed to answer specific questions rather than having one standard peer group; however, there was no available documentation to demonstrate this.

c. Standard 1.C: Student Learning

      i. 1.C.1

*1.C.1 The institution offers programs with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission, culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes that lead to collegiate-level degrees, certificates, or credentials and include designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.*

New courses and programs at SOU are developed and approved through a multi-layered approach involving various and appropriate constituencies before being finally approved by the Board of Trustees and the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Committee. Undergraduate curricula are designed to provide students with a variety of stackable certificates and microcredentials that are built in to their degree plans. When asked if the number of available certificates are confusing to students and/or faculty advisors, both faculty and students seemed comfortable with the process for selecting these credentials and noted that they do not generally add to time-to-degree. Further, students and faculty feel that the credentials add value to degree programs.

In discussions with various stakeholders including Faculty Senate, the Strategic Enrollment Council, and Executive Leadership, the peer evaluators were unable to learn how the institution balances increasing enrollment, development of new programs, and the financial strain of the institution, which has culminated in the reduction of more than 80 FTE across various employment categories.

      ii. 1.C.2

*1.C.2 The institution awards credit, degrees, certificates, or credentials for programs that are based upon student learning and learning outcomes that offer an appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning.*

SOU uses a platform called Improve to map courses to program learning outcomes, which are mapped to SOU's strategic plan; however, there is no standardization for course-level learning outcomes, which could make the mapping process challenging for some courses. Programs undergo periodic review to ensure quality in all programs. A new General Education model, launched in fall 2023, further ensures that course sequencing is appropriate for all degree programs.

      iii. 1.C.3

*1.C.3 The institution identifies and publishes expected program and degree learning outcomes for all degrees, certificates, and credentials. Information on expected student learning outcomes for all courses is provided to enrolled students.*

The catalog provides information about program and course information; however, in the self-study and in conversations with various faculty and administrators, it is clear that SOU lacks a standardized expectation and template for publishing program learning outcomes.

Further, while the peer evaluation team was assured that all programs have learning outcomes, the self-study notes that in the catalog, various programs list what kinds of experiences students might have, or what they will gain from the program instead of more traditional learning outcomes structured in a way to help align student expectations with course and program expectations.

In conversations with the University Assessment Committee, the peer evaluation team was told that all programs are required to have a traditional set of learning outcomes, and that these learning outcomes are a required component of annual assessment reporting.

*Concern: Learning outcomes are not systematically published in the catalog.*

### iv. 1.C.4

*1.C.4 The institution's admission and completion or graduation requirements are clearly defined, widely published, and easily accessible to students and the public.*

SOU's website and catalog provide ample information about admission and graduation requirements. The catalog has easily accessible information about these policies in addition to other academic policies.

### v. 1.C.5

*1.C.5 The institution engages in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs. The institution recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning, and improve instructional programs.*

SOU requires that all programs engage in academic assessment reporting annually. Program faculty input information about outcomes assessment into Improve. Several reports were made available to peer evaluators to review. These reports focus heavily on quantitative outcomes. In conversations with various groups, the evaluation team heard that there is a desire to be able to meaningfully incorporate more qualitative reporting into these reports; however, the Improve platform does allow narratives, but it is not designed to highlight or report on non-quantitative input. The University Assessment Committee is aware of this desire.

Conversations with individual faculty revealed that while most faculty are interested in participating in the assessment process, some don't know how to approach it, and don't seem to be aware of supports offered through the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CATL). Further, faculty generally were not able to articulate what happens to their assessment reports once they are submitted or how the institution uses the results of student learning assessment.

*Concern: Though assessment happens on campus, it is uneven and not all faculty understand how to best assess their students' learning.*

vi.   1.C.6

*1.C.6 Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses, across all associate and bachelor level programs or within a General Education curriculum, institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies. Examples of such learning outcomes and competencies include, but are not limited to, effective communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy.*

SOU launched a new General Education model in fall 2023. This new model is innovative, student-centered, and was designed with collaboration from many stakeholders across campus. In meetings with various stakeholders, the peer evaluation team found that the process for the redesign was transparent, and even when faculty members didn't see their input realized in the final model, they understood the rationale and felt that they were able to voice their opinions and concerns.

While the assessment model for the new General Education programs is being finalized, the University Assessment Committee is actively implementing the former GE assessment model. The older model consists of scoring student work samples with common rubrics focusing on written communication, critical thinking, information literacy, quantitative reasoning, and oral communication.

*Compliment: The General Education Task Force worked to collaboratively create a student-centered, thoughtful General Education Model.*


vii.   1.C.7

*1.C.7 The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes.*

Annual assessment reporting is required of all programs at SOU. Feedback is provided, along with offers for support when needed. When asked about comparing student learning in online versus face-to-face courses, the peer evaluators were told that online program assessment is decentralized, with some programs using departmental checklists, while others use the Quality Matters framework.

When asked how assessment of student learning is used at the institutional level, various personnel told the peer evaluation team that the Improve platform is able to generate reports that could be used at the institutional level; however, such reports were not available to the peer evaluator team and there was no indication that such reports are either evaluated for their usefulness nor are they used consistently to guide decision making about improving student learning at SOU.

*Concern: Though various groups assured the peer evaluators that program assessments are rolled up to the institutional level to inform academic and learning-support planning, no evidence was provided to substantiate these claims.*

      viii.   1.C.8

*1.C.8 Transfer credit and credit for prior learning is accepted according to clearly defined, widely published, and easily accessible policies that provide adequate safeguards to ensure academic quality. In accepting transfer credit, the receiving institution ensures that such credit accepted is appropriate for its programs and comparable in nature, content, academic rigor, and quality.*

SOU posts information about transfer credit and credit for prior learning in the catalog. The policies are complete and robust, and include general information as well as information pertaining to specific groups of students (I.e., international students). The peer evaluators spoke to students about their experiences with transferring credits, and students were generally pleased with the seamless experience. Faculty who serve as advisors to students also noted that the process is smooth and student-centered.

      ix.   1.C.9

*1.C.9 The institution's graduate programs are consistent with its mission, are in keeping with the expectations of its respective disciplines and professions, and are described through nomenclature that is appropriate to the levels of graduate and professional degrees offered. The graduate programs differ from undergraduate programs by requiring, among other things, greater: depth of study; demands on student intellectual or creative capacities; knowledge of the literature of the field; and ongoing student engagement in research, scholarship, creative expression, and/or relevant professional practice.*

SOU offers 15 graduate programs, many of which are subject to discipline accreditation. The graduate programs are appropriate for the institution and the region, and broadly support workforce needs, for example by offering graduate degrees in education and mental health fields.

Graduate programs at SOU are subject to the same approval processes as undergraduate programs, and go through several levels of approval to ensure that they offer appropriate rigor and alignment to the institutional mission.

d.   Standard 1.D: Student Achievement
      i.   1.D.1

*1.D.1 Consistent with its mission, the institution recruits and admits students with the potential to benefit from its educational programs. It orients students to ensure they understand the requirements related to their programs of study and receive timely, useful, and accurate information and advice about relevant academic requirements, including graduation and transfer policies.*

Consistent with its mission, Southern Oregon University focuses on providing equitable access to prospective students in identifying, admitting, and enrolling students who have demonstrated the potential to benefit from its educational programs.

The peer evaluation team validated that the premise of their student admissions and recruitment approach is in the initial stages of integration within the institution's Strategic Enrollment Management Plan. Specifically, staff noted that there will be further connectivity between their admissions and recruitment vision and their strategic enrollment management plan, although that has yet to formally occur.  Staff indicated that their SEM plan still needs to undergo deeper connectivity to the university's Strategic Plan and SOU Forward.

After students are admitted at SOU, they participate in college orientation events to continue their onboarding experience.  Further, SOU students are all assigned a Student Success Coordinator (SSC) and a faculty advisor and they must meet with their SSC or faculty advisor each year. The faculty advisors & student success coordinators provide students with in-depth, program specific information related to course requirements, course placement support, graduation requirements and information about transfer pathways in conjunction with the Registrar's Office.

*Compliment:  SOU is focused on communicating to students during orientations early on about the variety of student support services that are offered to help them succeed.*

## ii.   1.D.2

*1.D.2 Consistent with its mission and in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions, the institution establishes and shares widely a set of indicators for student achievement including, but not limited to, persistence, completion, retention, and postgraduation success. Such indicators of student achievement should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that may help promote student achievement and close barriers to academic excellence and success (equity gaps).*

Southern Oregon University established and has published some of their indicators for student achievement to include *aggregate* graduation rates, retention rates for freshman, and degrees awarded by gender and ethnicity. The peer evaluation team noted that SOU publishes these IPEDS indicators on their IR website each year. There is no indication that SOU has compared their student achievement indicator data outcomes against regional and national peers. The evaluation team inquired with multiple SOU staff to learn which institutions SOU has established as their regional and national peers for student achievement indicator comparison. The staff were not able to provide this information to the evaluators.

Finally, there is very little evidence of student achievement indicator disaggregation beyond what is reported to IPEDS and consequently published on the SOU IR webpage.  A small amount of disaggregated student achievement data is published on the IR website (within the "common data sets" page); however, the team identified during the site visit that not all faculty and staff were aware of the availability of these data.  There is no evidence that the student achievement indicator data is used to help close barriers to academic excellence and success (equity gaps).

*Concern: The creation, publication and wide distribution of institutional disaggregated student achievement indicators is not well-established at SOU. Further, SOU has not compared their disaggregated student achievement indicators against regional and national peers. There was no evidence that SOU has formally established regional and national peers for comparison in this regard.*

### iii. 1.D.3

*1.D.3 The institution's disaggregated indicators of student achievement should be widely published and available on the institution's website. Such disaggregated indicators should be aligned with meaningful, institutionally identified indicators benchmarked against indicators for peer institutions at the regional and national levels and be used for continuous improvement to inform planning, decision making, and allocation of resources.*

As noted above, Southern Oregon University publishes some basic disaggregated indicators of student achievement on their institutional research webpage based upon data submitted to IPEDS each year. However, since SOU has not identified regional or national peers, they have not done any benchmarking against peer data associated with the disaggregated student achievement indicators.

The team observed during the site visit that SOU, as a collective institution, has not been very focused on their disaggregated student achievement indicators as a means of continuous improvement. The team was told by some SOU staff that the next step in the SOU continuous improvement journey is to begin to scale up its use of their student achievement indicators to inform its decision making around the implementation of strategies to increase student access and success university wide. It was noted during the site visit that SOU is in its infancy in the development and implementation of their Strategic Enrollment Management plan which it is anticipated will include more emphasis on incorporating disaggregated student achievement indicator data in their student retention strategies.

*Concern: The evaluation team noted that SOU has not yet integrated its use of disaggregated student achievement indicator data from its planning processes to inform and implement strategies to guide planning, decision making, and allocation of resources.*

### iv. 1.D.4

*1.D.4 The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing indicators of student achievement are transparent and are used to inform and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity.*

As noted in their self-study and validated by the peer evaluation team, SOU publishes its "Common Data Sets" on the SOU IR webpage. The Common Data Sets that are published are the same data that the institution reports to IPEDS using the prescribed IPEDS methodologies. While there was one example noted in the self-study of one department using these data to inform or assess strategies at the department level (e.g. the Disability Resource program tracks retention, graduation, and DFWI rates for students with

disabilities and compares them to rates for admitted undergraduate non-disabled students at SOU), there is no evidence that the student achievement indicators are used by the institution at large to inform and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity.

The self-study notes that the use of data in decision-making is embedded in the work of various groups across campus, but it is rare and uneven. The peer evaluation team could not identify the use of this data in decision making from various groups across the campus nor from the university administration team. The peer evaluation team noted from some staff and faculty that the desired state was to engage in this activity soon (for example through the work of the Strategic Enrollment Council).

*Concern: SOU does not have a current focus on analyzing their (disaggregated) student achievement indicator data and is not using such an analysis to inform and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate student achievement gaps.*

## VI.   Standard 2: Governance, Resources, and Capacity

The following Standard 2 elements were specifically reviewed during the visit as either PRFR findings, items included in the self-evaluation report addenda, or as areas of interest resulting from meetings during the visit.

e.   Standard 2.B: Academic Freedom

i.   2.B.1

*2.B.1 Within the context of its mission and values, the institution adheres to the principles of academic freedom and independence that protect its constituencies from inappropriate internal and external influences, pressures, and harassment.*

The institution has established policies promoting academic freedom for students and employees; however, the policy lacks the inclusion of harassment. Evaluators note these policies are dated and difficult to find on the website, and are not updated from expected review date of July 2019.

ii.   2.B.2

*2.B.2 Within the context of its mission and values, the institution defines and actively promotes an environment that supports independent thought in the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. It affirms the freedom of faculty, staff, administrators, and students to share their scholarship and reasoned conclusions with others. While the institution and individuals within the institution may hold to a particular personal, social, or religious philosophy, its constituencies are intellectually free to test and examine all knowledge and theories, thought, reason, and perspectives of truth. Individuals within the institution allow others the freedom to do the same.*

The institution has a policy for academic freedom covering employees. Multiple policies governing student conduct, including speech activities, are found in the student's code of conduct, rights, and responsibilities. Evaluators recognize SOU's efforts to update policies and modernize the policy library and encourages date stamps on its policies. Recently, the

institution has begun to work with student leaders to communicate policy information to the student body.

f.  Standard 2.D: Institutional Integrity
    i.  2.D.1

*2.D.1 The institution represents itself clearly, accurately, and consistently through its announcements, statements, and publications. It communicates its academic intentions, programs, and services to students and to the public and demonstrates that its academic programs can be completed in a timely fashion. It regularly reviews its publications to ensure accuracy and integrity in all representations about its mission, programs, and services.*

The institution lacks clear, accurate, and consistent information about the accuracy of its course offerings and programs. The institution has 44 pages of special student fees indicating an unanticipated and possibly prohibitive additional cost of attendance. At the time of the site visit, the policy attached to these fees was a broken link.

Many of the institution's policies are out-of-date. The peer evaluators have a general concern about the relevancy of the institution's policies to state and federal regulations and to NWCCU policies. Further, SOU lacks a formal, documented process to review and update policies. For example, at the time of the site visit, the institution's recently updated prior learning policy was not posted on the website or in the catalog. General counsel indicated there are 340 policies; these are not all on the policy website.

*Concern: Special student fees may be excessive, and evaluators perceive the fees could affect student success. Students at the time of decision making may not accurately incorporate these fees into the cost of attendance.*

*Concern: The institution lacks a formal, documented process for reviewing and updating policies on a regular basis.*

    ii.  2.D.2

*2.D.2 The institution advocates, subscribes to, and exemplifies high ethical standards in its management and operations, including in its dealings with the public, NWCCU, and external organizations, including the fair and equitable treatment of students, faculty, administrators, staff, and other stakeholders and constituencies. The institution ensures that complaints and grievances are addressed in a fair, equitable, and timely manner.*

SOU meets this standard through multiple policies governing student conduct, faculty grading, union agreements, and faculty grievance. Evaluators took note of the institution's ongoing plans to update policies for consistency, relevance, and effective governance.

    iii.  2.D.3

*2.D.3 The institution adheres to clearly defined policies that prohibit conflicts of interest on the part of members of the governing board(s), administration, faculty, and staff.*

The institution has a combined consensual relationships and conflict of interest policy updated in 2022, which pertains to faculty and staff. The existing policy focuses almost entirely on the issue of consensual relationships, while missing complex issues such as nepotism, federal rules governing research and grants, outside employment, and financial gain.

*Concern: the institution's conflict of interest policy lacks information about nepotism, federal rules governing research and grants, outside employment, and financial gain.*

### iv. 2.F.2

*2.F.2 The institution provides faculty, staff, and administrators with appropriate opportunities and support for professional growth and development.*

The institution provides access to LinkedIn Learning to employees. Additional opportunities for professional development are inconsistently applied and offered, particularly given the financial constraints faced by the institution. Consequently, employees are unclear as to the support available to them for professional growth and development.

### v. 2.F.3

*2.F.3 Consistent with its mission, programs, and services, the institution employs faculty, staff, and administrators sufficient in role, number, and qualifications to achieve its organizational responsibilities, educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic programs.*

While the institution carefully considers the number of faculty, staff, and administrators needed to fulfill its mission, peer evaluators found that policies related to this area are out of date and under review. Further, in discussions with various stakeholders, it was unclear whether the current workload, given the recent reduction in workforce, is sustainable.

*Concern: Policies are out dated and the plan for reviewing and updating them is in process, but lacks clarity.*

### vi. 2.F.4

*2.F.4 Faculty, staff, and administrators are evaluated regularly and systematically in alignment with institutional mission and goals, educational objectives, and policies and procedures. Evaluations are based on written criteria that are published, easily accessible, and clearly communicated. Evaluations are applied equitably, fairly, and consistently in relation to responsibilities and duties.*

*Personnel are assessed for effectiveness and are provided feedback and encouragement for improvement.*

Conversations with several groups noted a perceived lack of professional development, particularly given increases in workload and responsibility. While leaders have suggested there is money for professional development, employees do not receive information about this access. In addition, some supervisors who have been offering professional development to their employees have done so using money derived outside of their budgets (e.g. grants and donations). In meetings, leaders indicated the workload had increased 50%, and would likely remain so for the next three years. Increases in workload were in part due to employees taking on responsibilities of colleagues no longer at SOU, and not necessarily a part of the employee's skill set. Additionally, the evaluators noted that performance reviews were occurring for classified, but not unclassified staff, and faculty similarly noted uneven performance reviews.

*Concern: Policies for evaluation of faculty and staff are out dated and applied unevenly, particularly for non-union employees.*

g. Standard 2.G: Student Support Resources
    i. 2.G.1
*2.G.1 Consistent with the nature of its educational programs and methods of delivery, and with a particular focus on equity and closure of equity gaps in achievement, the institution creates and maintains effective learning environments with appropriate programs and services to support student learning and success.*

SOU lacks a policy to ensure that online learning environments meet NWCCU's policy on Regular and Substantive Interaction. While various employees assured the peer evaluators that online course sections are substantially the same as in-person modalities in terms of instructor interaction with students, the peer evaluators were unable to find evidence or documentation that the institution communicates how instructors should interact with students. When asked to review instructor interactions in Moodle, a meeting was arranged; however, the peer evaluators were not allowed to access analytics to review instructor interaction. It should be noted that SOU's administration offered to set up time after the visit concluded to review Moodle analytics; however, with the visit concluded, the peer evaluation team determined this would not be a useful activity.

*Concern: SOU lacks a policy pertaining to Regular and Substantive Interaction in online modalities.*

    ii. 2.G.2
*2.G.2 The institution publishes in a catalog, or provides in a manner available to students and other stakeholders, current and accurate information that includes: institutional mission; admission requirements and procedures; grading policy;*

*information on academic programs and courses, including degree and program completion requirements, expected learning outcomes, required course sequences, and projected timelines to completion based on normal student progress and the frequency of course offerings; names, titles, degrees held, and conferring institutions for administrators and full-time faculty; rules and regulations for conduct, rights, and responsibilities; tuition, fees, and other program costs; refund policies and procedures for students who withdraw from enrollment; opportunities and requirements for financial aid; and the academic calendar.*

The catalog provides comprehensive information about SOU's mission, admission and graduation policies, faculty information, and other relevant policies and procedures. However, as noted in the self-study and in conversation with several employees, learning outcomes are not consistently published in the catalog or elsewhere. The peer evaluators were told that SOU is working to create a template that would include a required space for learning outcomes; however, as of the site visit, the template does not exist and learning outcomes are posted only when programs choose to include that information.

*Concern: Learning outcomes are not published in the catalog or in any standardized way on SOU's website.*

### iii. 2.G.6

*2.G.6 The institution designs, maintains, and evaluates a systematic and effective program of academic advisement to support student development and success. Personnel responsible for advising students are knowledgeable of the curriculum, program and graduation requirements, and are adequately prepared to successfully fulfill their responsibilities. Advising requirements and responsibilities of advisors are defined, published, and made available to students.*

The faculty are responsible for advising within their majors, and professional advisors are prepared to advise students within the advisor's area of responsibility and across other areas. The evaluators noted the processes for advising, its requirements and responsibilities, seem to be consistent with this standard. However, evaluation of advising was not evident.

*Concern: SOU lacks a systematic evaluation process for determining the effectiveness of academic advisement.*

## VII. Summary

Southern Oregon University's Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) self-evaluation report was generally well-written, if thin in some areas. While some requests for additional information were unable to be fulfilled, most such requests were met with enthusiasm. The peer evaluation team greatly appreciated the flexibility and candor of the groups who took time out of their schedules to participate in this process. Faculty and students are deeply devoted to SOU, which was evident in each conversation.

## VIII. Commendations and Recommendations

    a. Commendations

        i. Commendation 1:

The peer evaluation team commends the work of the General Education Task Force in the planning and development of the new General Education model, which is innovative, thoughtful, and student-centered.

        ii. Commendation 2:

The peer evaluation team commends the university for prioritizing student access and success amidst the pandemic, wildfires, financial constraints, and other challenges.

        iii. Commendation 3:

The peer evaluation team commends SOU's faculty and staff for their resiliency and commitment to the institution and its students.

        iv. Commendation 4:

The peer evaluation team commends President Bailey for taking bold, transparent action to address financial health and management.

    b. Recommendations (each recommendation must reference one or more standards)

        i. Recommendation 1:

The peer evaluation team recommends that the institution demonstrate a continuous process to assess institutional effectiveness, including student learning, student achievement, and support services by creating an ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement. (1.B.1)

        ii. Recommendation 2:

The peer evaluation team recommends that the institution set and articulate meaningful goals, objectives, and indicators of its goals to define mission fulfillment and to improve its effectiveness in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions. (1.B.2)

        iii. Recommendation 3:

The peer evaluation team recommends that the university benchmark their disaggregated student achievement indicators against student achievement indicators from regional and national peer institutions. (1.D.2)

        iv. Recommendation 4:

The peer evaluation team recommends that the university use their benchmarked student achievement indicators to inform the creation of student achievement goals for the institution and to pursue continuous improvement efforts in planning, decision making,

and allocation of resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity. (1.D.3. and 1.D.4)

v. Recommendation 5:

The peer evaluation team recommends the university fully demonstrate that the results of its assessment efforts are systematically used to inform academic and learning-support planning practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes and student support services. (1.C.5 & 1.C.7)

vi. Recommendation 6:

The peer evaluation team recommends that the institution publishes in the catalog, or provides in a manner available to students and other stakeholders, expected student learning outcomes. (1.C.3 & 2.G.2)

vii. Recommendation 7:

The peer evaluation team recommends that the institution creates a Regular and Substantive Interaction policy to maintain effective learning environments with appropriate programs and services to support student learning and success. (2.G.1)