

**Mid-Cycle Evaluation
Peer Evaluation Report**

**University of Puget Sound
Tacoma, Washington
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A confidential report of findings prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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Evaluators

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Introduction

The University of Puget Sound is an independent, residential, predominantly undergraduate liberal arts college founded in 1888 and located in Tacoma, Washington. With a student population generally averaging 2600, Puget Sound also offers graduate degrees in Public Health, Education, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy. Governed by a wholly independent Board of Trustees, Puget Sound honors its Methodist founders on the basis of shared values of access, academic freedom, social justice, stewardship, and global engagement.

An intellectually engaged faculty committed to teaching and student development, a broad range of academic programs, a focus on learning beyond the classroom, and a commitment to access, equity and inclusion provide a welcoming learning community. A 10-year strategic plan, *Leadership for a Changing World*, was approved by the Board of Trustees in 2018, and provides guidance for current development at the institution. The addition of academic programs such as the Freedom Education Project Puget Sound at the Washington Corrections Center for Women; a doctorate in occupational therapy and a master's in public health; a major in gender and queer studies and minors in ethnomusicology and francophone studies demonstrate the institution's entrepreneurial spirit and its commitment to equity and inclusion.

University of Puget Sound has no outstanding recommendations to address as part of their Spring 2021 Mid-Cycle Evaluation. The 2018 Ad Hoc report accepted by the Commission on July 27, 2018, addressed Recommendation 1 from the Spring 2013 Year Three Peer-Evaluation Report, and no further action was required. There were no recommendations from the Year One Mission and Core Themes Report from 2019.

Assessment of Institution's Self-Evaluation Report

The University's Self-Evaluation Report was thoughtful and strongly written, responsibly addressing the primary expectations of Standard 1. The attached background documents provided detail for the assertions and analysis of the narrative and successfully illustrated the process and outcomes of the example programmatic assessment in the core curriculum and the Gender and Queer Studies major. The choice of these two programs gave clear examples of the process of the Curriculum Committee. The core curriculum assessment gave a strong sense of the collaborative work of the faculty, and the GQS assessment demonstrated the process of

developing and evaluating a new interdisciplinary major and engaged student feedback effectively.

It was sometimes challenging to determine responses to particular sub-items in the standards, and specific issues around forms of evidence are identified later in this evaluation report. It would be helpful in the self-study for the Seven Year Mission Fulfillment visit to identify and sequence responses more explicitly to the subsections of the standards, although we realize that there is some interconnected overlap among these items.

STANDARD ONE - STUDENT SUCCESS AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND EFFECTIVENESS

Standard 1.A. Institutional Mission

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

The University's mission statement articulates its commitment to student learning and achievement and clearly identifies the broad educational capacities it aims to develop in all students as: critical analysis, aesthetic appreciation, sound judgment, and apt expression. These goals are amplified in the Curriculum Statement outlining graduation requirements and coordinated with learning outcomes developed for co-curricular experiences. High impact practices, as articulated by George Kuh and the American Association of Colleges and Universities, are described as mechanisms to deliver effectively on the promises of the mission. An appendix is supplied to provide an analytical crosswalk to articulate the interaction among the mission, educational goals, and high impact practices.

The mission statement is readily visible in University publications and on the University website. It is referenced in annual financial reports, programs for Commencement, and in grant proposals. It is also discussed in staff orientations, faculty and staff meetings, and other settings, thus becoming part of the regular life and reflection of the institution.

Standard 1.B Improving Institutional Effectiveness

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.

The University has developed a model for evaluating the extent of mission fulfillment which focuses on and assesses three components:

- Student enrollment and persistence to graduation
- Student achievement along essential learning outcomes (apt expression, critical analysis and creativity, rich knowledge of self and others, engaged citizenship)
- Student progress toward a lifetime of holistic learning

For each of these components, the University has identified methods of assessment and target goals. The Division of Student Affairs has also articulated goals to support and assess mission fulfillment: knowledge of self and others; integrity; wellness; community engagement. Some selected assessment methods include direct measurement (e.g. graduation and retention rates); some use faculty evaluation and review (e.g. writing portfolios); many use the senior survey, alumni surveys, and outside instruments such as the HEDs Senior Survey and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which allow for comparison with external peer institutions. The Office of Institutional Research is coordinating data aggregation and analysis across all areas to inform mission fulfillment outcomes.

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 10-year strategic plan, *Leadership for a Changing World*, which was approved and adopted by the Board of trustees in 2018, resulted from wide consultation with students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, trustees, and community partners. It lays out five broad goals:

- Advance institutional excellence, academic distinction, and student success
- Enrich our learning environment through increased diversity, inclusion, and access
- Support and inspire our faculty and staff
- Enhance engagement with the community, including promotion of environmental justice and sustainability
- Pursue entrepreneurial and other opportunities to fully leverage and expand our assets

The strategic plan helps to draw together the multiple and interrelated threads of assessment undertaken by the University.

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.

Institutional governance assures a continuous process of review and assessment and guides the institution towards continuous improvement. The Curriculum Committee and the Budget Task Force are inclusive in their membership and provide opportunities for engagement and feedback with the campus community. The annual reports of the Curriculum Committee provide clear summaries of the considerations and decisions of the group.

The Budget Task Force (BTF), which is chaired by the Provost and includes the Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, as well as faculty, staff, and student representation, meets throughout the fall and early winter. The BTF reviews available data and presentations, consults the campus community through Town Halls, and works to create a budget that responds to institutional needs and priorities. The group presents a report and proposed budget to the President, who uses it to develop his recommended budget, which is presented to the Board of Trustees for consideration, review and approval. As indicated by the Board meeting reports to

the community, discussion of budget decisions is full and thorough, prioritizes student access and success, and ensures that resource allocations align as much as possible with the goals and priorities of the strategic plan in order to enhance mission fulfillment.

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.

Though the institution clearly engages in continuing and engaged analysis and consideration of its practices and the resulting student learning, the evaluation team observed that less attention was given to external patterns and trends than might be valuable for guiding future directions. The University's plan for a broad assessment of all units of the institution in the coming year offers an opportunity to broaden the scope of comparators and considerations in its planning.

Standard 1.C. Student Learning

1.C.1 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.

The University offers a wide range of undergraduate majors and programs and graduate degree programs in selected health sciences and in education. The institution has been developing guidelines for the planning of interdisciplinary programs in order to meet student interest and better support such curricular innovation.

1.C.2 Awards credit, degrees, certificates or credentials for programs that are based on student learning and learning outcomes that offer an appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning.

Awarding of credit for degrees and programs is carefully planned by faculty for content and structure to provide strong learning outcomes in recognized fields of study. Learning outcomes are identified and help to assure appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing and synthesis of learning.

1.C.3 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.

Most undergraduate program and degree student learning outcomes are published on the website. Student learning outcomes are provided to students in syllabi and departmental information sources.

1.C.4 Admission and completion or graduation requirements are clearly defined, widely published, and easily accessible to students and the public.

Admission and graduation requirements are published on the University website and in the Bulletin and are made clear to applicants and students.

1.C.5 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.

Faculty are central to the University's curriculum development and assessment practices. The Student Learning Outcomes team works with Chairs, Directors and Deans to review annual assessment reports and suggest improvements in assessment practices. The Curriculum Committee divides into ad hoc groups who review courses, new program proposals, programs and receive charges from the Faculty Senate. A seven-year review cycle for departments and core curriculum has been established.

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.

Syllabi contain respective student learning outcomes and methods for assessment. Detailed instruction schedules are included, with activities described and responsible faculty noted. All appear to align with the University's Mission.

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

Two examples were provided to demonstrate the assessment cycle and use of assessment in planning. While extensive indirect data is collected and analyzed, little evidence of direct and objective data analysis was noted. Some assessment results are used to inform planning, such as creating new programs and considering changes in the core curriculum. However, it was difficult to identify clear examples of program improvement driven by learning assessment findings.

The example of the assessment of the core curriculum provided in the self-evaluation demonstrates the institution's focus on sequencing and synthesis of learning. The core curriculum is tied to the educational goals for the institution (<https://www.pugetsound.edu/academics/academic-resources/mission-educational-goals/>);

the seven elements of the program (Seminars in Scholarly Inquiry; Five Approaches to Knowing; Connections) are assessed on a rotating cycle. In addition to the identification of learning outcomes for each element of the core, rubrics are developed and revised to assist faculty in planning for and achieving the learning outcomes.

An example of the concern for sequencing of learning and improvement as a result of assessment was described regarding the Seminars in Scholarly Inquiry, which are focused on critical thinking and communication, and information literacy. As a result of assessment, the two SSI courses have been designed to be intentionally sequenced and scaffolded. They have also been revised to require at least one structured oral presentation in order to meet the oral communication learning outcome.

The core curriculum as a whole is assessed every seven years, most recently in 2015. In that review, a desire emerged to review and revise the core curriculum; to date there have not been major changes in the core; however, progress through the core is recommended to change, and a new requirement in experiential learning has recently been adopted for implementation.

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.

Transfer policies are also available on the website and in the Bulletin and are clear and appropriate. Courses taught in traditional classroom settings qualify for transfer. A limited number of units of distance learning or self-paced study may be accepted for transfer if, upon evaluation, they meet established requirements.

1.C.9 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 at Puget Sound are appropriately accredited and certified by the relevant professional organizations and engage students at a rigorous level of learning and intellectual and creative growth. The self-evaluation did not specifically explore the graduate programs but will consider them in more detail in the Year Seven report.

Standard 1.D. Student Achievement

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.

Descriptions of the University's recruitment or student orientation information were not provided in the Mid-Cycle report. Information was gathered via the University website and in discussions.

The Office of Admissions supports the University mission by recruiting and admitting students who will thrive and succeed. According to the 10-year Strategic Plan, student recruitment is addressed in one of the five goals: "Advance institutional excellence, academic distinction and student success." A Strategic Enrollment Plan (SEP) is under development and will include a recruitment portion. The Student Success Task Force isn't responsible for SEP development, yet members overlap.

Admissions information is readily available on the University website (tuition, application, FAQ, etc.) and is navigable. Many admissions staff appear to be alumni and were helpful during discussions. The University hosts informational events for admitted students, advertised in the "Admitted Student Events" website. The University has a faculty-advisor based system and training is provided. First year students are assigned advisors and are transitioned to advisors in their field of study in the second year. Orientation is provided for new students, with plans to create orientation targeted to first-generation students.

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).

The University has identified multiple sources as indicators for student achievement. Typical progression data includes retention and graduation rates whereas post-graduation metrics such as continuing education; employment and salary data are also included. The University recognized the common challenges in collecting alumni data. Interestingly, the cohort default rate was included yet the relationship to achievement wasn't clearly identified. Co-curricular participation is an indicator under development.

The NWCCU standards expect indicators for student achievement to be "widely shared" and the University identifies Sound Reports as the vehicle to share information. Examples were requested and revealed useful data. According to Appendix III, categories of first-generation, Pell and financial need have not been published. As such, it's unclear if those indicators have been widely shared.

Student achievement data has been disaggregated by race/ethnic identity, gender identity, first-generation status, Pell status and financial need, yet the data was not readily retrievable.

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.

According to the General Information webpage, Common Data Sets are published for each academic year. The data sets present Pell grant/subsidized loan disaggregation and graduation rates (persistence) and fall 2020 freshman profile transfer profile, military service (not disaggregated), among other information. In addition, UCAN reports are provided, which profile class demographics, tuition, and campus life; Student Achievement measures, which include retention rates, graduation rates, GPA, high impact practice, CE, employment, salary and cohort default rate, are provided. The data is disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, first generation, Pell and financial need, yet much of the data is listed as "not available." Thus, it's difficult to evaluate or interpret the data presented.

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.

Appendix III is a helpful series of tables, similar to dashboards, reflecting the status of student achievement on disaggregated data, sharing trends, comparison to peers, source and publication format. Unfortunately, it includes gap percent data rather than representative data. As such, not all disaggregated data was available, leaving the analysis lacking. When data is available, the University has identified areas for growth, such as improving graduation rates for underrepresented minorities. The report indicates attention is focused on these areas, yet details weren't provided.

The report identified four rather than five regional peer institutions for comparison analysis, citing a lack of similarity to identify a fifth. Areas for improvement include male-identifying students, graduation rates and persistence of underrepresented minorities, financial need, and first-generation students. In addition, experiential learning participation is lower than peer institutions.

Examples of approaches to address equity gaps were provided, such as addressing implicit bias amongst faculty with coordinated training sessions and programs to increase student retention. It is unclear what data was used to inform these solutions, yet the report cites an impressive breadth of action. One example,

the Student Success Task Force, is ongoing and aligned with the Strategic Plan in supporting student achievement and shrinking equity gaps.

While providing current status and comparison to peers, the report shared little detail regarding plans for improvement, methods to assess such plans and the use of data in decision-making.

The Gender and Queer Studies (GQS) major was selected as an example of continuous programmatic assessment. The University examined gender and queer studies in 2014 when it was a minor offering, and culminated in an interdisciplinary major provided in fall of 2020. It appears eleven students are participating at this time.

Data collected via exit interviews and graduate student interviews informed the student perspective. A faculty-driven self-reflection process included a grant-supported gender studies consortium of peer institutions. Four goals/outcomes, which aligned with the University mission, were created in 2017. It remains unclear how direct assessment is used to evaluate these goals. Institutional Research data provided is enrollment-focused, including majors, minors and degrees conferred disaggregated by gender and race. Use of e-Portfolios is cited to support high-impact practices. The opportunity for students to explore global opportunities within this major were highlighted.

Program self-assessments were provided for 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2020. A curricular review occurred in 2019, resulting in an ad hoc curriculum group supporting development of a major. Of note, the major had been a special interdisciplinary major (SIM) with cross-listed courses across 20 departments via approved electives prior to being approved as a new program. While student interest exists, challenges with staffing remain. Assessment cycle completion was somewhat unclear as current indicators for program success lack direct assessment.

Moving Forward

The Self-Evaluation identified three areas for further work as the institution moves forward to the Year Seven report: transparency of student achievement measures; alignment of course, program, and institutional outcomes; and equity and inclusion. These are important areas for focus, and all of them, in some degree, have been delayed in their progress due to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The plan to provide greater public access to student achievement measures through a dashboard or some other mechanism is laudable. A broadened reach for peer comparisons and a widened set of student achievement measures which more explicitly make external and direct measures visible would contribute significantly to the definition and understanding of mission fulfillment.

Alignment of course, program and institutional outcomes will be an important and useful element in the Year Seven report, and continuing work on the interrupted plan to map that integration of goals will be important. Revisions of the Student Evaluations of Teaching to support these data will also be useful. Although it is certainly challenging to reach alignment of the various levels of assessment, successful work in this area will help the entire institution and the public to understand the outcomes of the educational programs and the contributions of the institution to student success and community flourishing.

It is clear from the Diversity Strategic Plan of the institution (<https://www.pugetsound.edu/about/diversity-at-puget-sound/diversity-strategic-plan/>) and from the work of the Chief Diversity Officer and the collaborative and data collection work of the recent years that the institution has a commitment to equity and inclusion. Though there are a variety of opinions on the campus concerning the success of these efforts, the coming comprehensive review of all units in the institution may help to align aspiration and achievement. Attention to the identified equity gaps in the disaggregated data included in the Self-Evaluation will be helpful in building toward the Year Seven self-study.

Compliments and Concerns

Compliments:

1. We compliment the faculty and staff of the University for their inclusive and dedicated attention to improvement of the institution. The ambitious and hard-working committee and task force engagement on a variety of issues, the innovation of the standing Accreditation Review Committee, the consistent attention of the Curriculum Committee and the Curriculum Task Force to the review and improvement of the curriculum will assist the institution in its progress.
2. We compliment the University leadership, faculty, and staff for their ambitious plan for a comprehensive review of all units in the year ahead and for their efforts to connect and integrate planning and understanding across the campus, including areas such as Strategic Enrollment Management, in order to better support student success.
3. We compliment the planning and innovation undertaken to support the growth and implementation of an experiential learning requirement and the incorporation of high impact practices in both academic and co-curricular domains.

Concerns:

1. Though some disaggregated data is being analyzed by relevant groups on campus, and equity gaps are being identified, this disaggregated data is not currently widely published and available on the institution's website. (Standard 1.D.3.).
2. Though the institution has developed a robust structure for assessing student learning, much of the data cited in the mid-cycle self-evaluation is dependent on indirect assessment methodology and is not always benchmarked to external comparators or anchored by direct assessment. The application of analysis to change and improvement in student learning is not consistently documented. (Standard 1.C.7., 1.D.4).