

Mid-Cycle Evaluation (Year 3)

Peer-Evaluation Report

College of Southern Idaho

Twin Falls, Idaho

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NWCCU Liaison to the Peer Evaluation Team:

Dr. Gita Bangera

Senior Vice President

A confidential report of findings prepared for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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Introduction

College of Southern Idaho's mid-cycle evaluation took place over two full business days, May 1-2, 2025. The visit's primary goal was to provide formative feedback on CSI's Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report. Beyond that, the evaluators were given two additional tasks — first, to assess the college's progress on Recommendation 1 from its 2022 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) report and, second, to conduct onsite follow-up to 2022's virtual EIE as required by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE).

The institution did everything in its power to make the visit successful. In particular, the evaluators received excellent support from the Accreditation Liaison Officer's staff. Onsite, whether in group meetings or one-to-one interviews, college staff were both welcoming and forthcoming. The institution's hospitality and openness are much appreciated.

Visit Summary

The three-member evaluation team spent the bulk of its time on the main Twin Falls campus, with one evaluator also visiting CSI's Mini-Cassia Center in Burley, Idaho. Over the course of the visit, the evaluators met with over 60 individuals representing a broad cross-section of the institution's leaders, faculty, and staff. Specific contacts included the President's Cabinet, Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Council, department chairs, institutional research staff, a sampling of dual-credit instructors, and representatives of several departments, both instructional and non-instructional, that had recently undergone program review. In addition, to fulfill USDE requirements for virtual visit follow-ups, the team toured campus facilities and conducted in-office meetings with human resources and library leaders.

CSI's 25-page self-study was posted on time, accompanied by a helpful set of appendices. Team requests for additional documents were met with prompt, cordial response. While the report's concision was welcome, in some areas the team might have appreciated additional context (e.g., CSI enrollment history, state dual-credit policy and trends) or examples (e.g., data-driven initiatives, monitoring of external conditions). Some embedded links proved troublesome.

Part I: Mission Fulfillment

College of Southern Idaho has adopted a developmental definition of mission fulfillment. Under that definition, CSI's mission is satisfied if two conditions are met — first, that CSI is attaining most of its goals and, second, that interventions are underway to address any below-target metrics. Onsite, campus decision-makers seemed comfortable with that approach.

The college follows a well-established cycle of annual planning, with predictable seasons of activity — prior-year data review (August-December), internal plan updates (January-February),

and submission of revisions to the Idaho State Board of Education (March-June). During the visit, interviewees confirmed that this familiar cadence has been in place for over several years.

As recently as February 2024, the institution opted to reduce its Strategic Plan to three student-success goals — access, retention, and success — eliminating former measures of community engagement and sustainability. To some extent, the decision stemmed from the post-COVID urgency of rebuilding enrollments and student support processes. It also aligns CSI's plan more closely with the mandated format of Idaho's annual strategic planning submissions.

While student success should be every campus's top priority, CSI leaders acknowledge the trade-offs inherent in mapping a strategic plan solely to a set of student attainment milestones. For one, it omits elements of CSI's broader mission, impacts, and valued activities. Further, it tends to focus attention on current operations rather than longer-term strategic positioning.

Those trade-offs are evident in CSI's processes for assessing mission fulfillment. Over each planning cycle, CSI's institutional effectiveness data passes through a variety of groups. Onsite interviews confirmed that, at the highest policy-setting level, the board of trustees annually reviews CSI's Strategic Plan scorecard to assess institutional performance and, if they so choose, to identify priorities. Those directives proceed next to the President's Cabinet. Beyond that, however, the evaluators struggled to identify clear lines of decision-making authority or direction-setting. On an ongoing basis, other groups — notably the Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Council and ad hoc Recruitment and Retention Huddles — have access to the data and use it to identify opportunities for interventions, often in the form of resolving bottlenecks in admissions, financial aid, registration, and section scheduling. While the evaluators were impressed by the energy, inventiveness, and collaborative spirit of these efforts, the examples emphasized short-term fixes rather than long-term, strategic priorities.

Arguably, this reactive tendency may impair the college's ability to evaluate its effectiveness over time. Often, the college's Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report notes, open-endedly, that its metrics will allow it to "strategically respond . . . as needed" (page 6), to "monitor efforts to improve success rates" (page 9), or to "track student behavior and adjust efforts accordingly" (page 10), without naming those responses, efforts, or adjustments. Their absence precludes any plan-do-evaluate cycle in the report's text — a gap that interviews onsite also left unfilled.

In its self-evaluation, CSI identifies the link between assessment and resource allocation as an area for continued refinement. The report points to a new cabinet-level initiative, launched in 2025, to address this gap. Onsite, that work was described as a more inclusive current-year budget-setting process in which requests are aligned with CSI's strategic goals. Further, the evaluators learned of a new \$1,000,000-plus innovation fund, authorized by the board, that accepts proposals for plan-aligned projects. These examples provided evidence that CSI is taking steps to connect its Strategic Plan to its resource allocation activities.

Part II: Student Achievement

The College of Southern Idaho has identified 18 measures of student achievement that are related to its three strategic planning goals. Some of these metrics and their associated benchmarks are mandated by the state. Data on some (but not all) of these measures, including graduation and retention, are publicly available on the college's website. Other measures are available on internal dashboards. Both the publicly available and internal dashboards allow for easy disaggregation of the data by ethnicity, age, gender, Pell eligibility, and first-generation status. However, as the Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report candidly acknowledges, benchmarks have not been established for disaggregated data. The evaluation team recognizes the challenging position of the college in balancing the language of NWCCU Standards and Title V grant requirements with emerging changes to Idaho law. The team appreciates the elegance of creating a metric of retention and success for low high school GPA students in order to balance these considerations and encourages CSI to continue creative efforts to identify and close equity gaps by finding suitable proxies for populations in need.

The evaluation team heard several examples of how disaggregated data is utilized internally to inform planning, decision-making, and resource allocation at the unit level. However, the team did not see evidence that disaggregated data is systematically reviewed to proactively plan at the cabinet or board/president level. In this regard, the current evaluators found little evidence of progress on concerns noted in the 2022 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness Peer Evaluation Report's evaluation of Standards 1.B.1, 1.B.2, 1.D.2, 1.D.3, 1.D.4, and 2.G.1.

The College of Southern Idaho has done a careful job of selecting peer institutions at the regional and national level, despite substantial challenges. Several of CSI's student achievement metrics are benchmarked to these peer comparators. To date, in making cross-institutional comparisons, CSI has been limited to Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) measures of retention and time-to-completion. The evaluation team noted with concern that many of CSI's other benchmarks are expressed as rates of expected increase over time. As a result, from one metric to the next, the targets can appear either as unambitious, aspirational, or out of line with current performance trends. For example, the objective of "increasing the percentage of students taking remedial math who enroll in a subsequent credit course" has a target of 48 percent against a current level of 42 percent, despite a 60 percent decrease in the denominator of those taking remedial math since 2020-21. The evaluation team encourages the college to set more meaningful benchmarks where possible.

Part III: Programmatic Assessment

The College of Southern Idaho conducts program assessments through two well-developed processes: Program Review for instructional programs and Support Services Program Review (SSPR) for non-instructional programs. In its Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report, the college provided two instruction-based examples: the Associate of Arts in Business Administration and

CSI's General Education Program. By request, the college also provided access to additional reviews for history, psychology, and theatre, dance and humanities. In addition, the evaluation team reviewed examples of SSPRs for several non-instructional programs.

Instructional Program Review

CSI's Program Review process was developed out of a town hall format with input from across campus. It has been in place for more than a decade and is annually reviewed and modified to remain relevant and responsive to state concerns, grant requirements, and other factors. For instance, in response to state-level guidance, the review now includes sections on durable skills and professional credentialing. Program reviews are completed annually within a Canvas learning-management system (LMS) shell, with all program faculty contributing. Feedback on the completed review is also submitted in the Canvas shell.

A read-through of the business administration, history, psychology, and theatre, dance and humanities programs confirmed that participants in the process are encouraged to review their course and program learning outcomes and, where appropriate, submit proposed revisions to the curriculum committee. The template also asks about alignment with CSI's Strategic Plan and solicits requests for resources. During the visit, department chairs and faculty members reported a high level of satisfaction with the process, citing its annual frequency, opportunity to make modifications to suit their individual programs, and timely access to requested data as strengths, although interviewees reported some disruptions as a result of CSI's recent shift to a new student data system. Recently, the program review timeline was modified to align more effectively with the college-level budgeting process.

As its second example, the Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report cited CSI's General Education Program Review. While the team was able to learn a great deal about the General Education Program from the self-study documentation, the 2023-2024 assessment report itself did not follow either of the established templates and did not appear to be a complete description and assessment of the work. A more recent General Education Program Review (2024-2025), provided during the visit, supplied a more detailed description of program efforts and analysis. While this document gave specifics about CSI's Assessment Week activities for November 2024 and provided a list of next steps, the evaluation team saw opportunities to create a more complete picture by using a consistent format for annual reports, directly addressing dual-credit assessment, incorporating all aspects of general education outcomes development and assessment throughout the year (including the spring assessment activity and the summer conference), and ensuring that feedback mechanisms and methods for assessing the implementation and utility of recommendations is included.

Despite these suggestions, the evaluation team was impressed by CSI's Program Review process. Its consistent cadence, degree of faculty engagement, and efforts to reduce the administrative demands of report preparation help to assure the system's sustainability.

Support Services Program Review

In 2024-2025, CSI launched a new process to evaluate non-instructional programs. Currently, the college has completed the first year of a four-year cycle for its first cohort, which included Herrett Center and Community Education, Bridge to Success, Student Activities, Student Housing, Marketing and Communication, and Military, Veteran, and International Student Services. The evaluation team reviewed completed reports for this initial group and met with representatives from each program. While some programs had maintained their assessment processes over time, most reported that regular evaluation had been paused during COVID. Representatives indicated that they were generally satisfied with the SSPR process and that it yielded meaningful information that could be used to improve programs. They noted that they were given support during the evaluation process, particularly around the collection of data, despite CSI's transition to its new student information system. The Institutional Research Department is helping participants to improve their data collection methods, which some found challenging in this first iteration.

The SSPR template provides a clear statement of purpose, scope, criteria, timelines, and potential responses. Programs are asked to use data to assess their operations and effectiveness, to align their activities with the college's Strategic Plan, and to request resources when appropriate. While the template requires programs to align activities with CSI's Strategic Plan, some programs found it challenging to fit their work into that framework. Nevertheless, participants reported that completing the SSPRs helped staff members better understand the college's goals.

The template design is meant to generate meaningful feedback and continuity across cycles. Notably, the college president has provided extensive and detailed comments on each program's report, covering such key topics as the importance of metrics and quantitative data, the integrity of data-gathering methods, alignment with the Strategic Plan, effective communication about program efforts, capacity building, and student privacy. Program representatives welcomed this feedback. Because CSI has just launched this process, it is too early to tell whether SSPR will provide meaningful and sustainable information for all support services areas. In general, however, the evaluation team feels that the first SSPR cycle demonstrates that it has the potential to do so.

PART IV: Moving Forward

The team was impressed by the sense of energy, positivity, and shared purpose that faculty and staff exhibited throughout the visit. In preparing for the Year Seven Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness, conveying that level of engagement could be a valuable part of telling CSI's story.

Each section of CSI's Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report concludes with a set of institutionally determined next steps. The evaluators found these suggestions to be well-reasoned, accurate,

and achievable. Accordingly, the team first encourages CSI to follow through on the self-study's recommendations.

Beyond those observations, the evaluation team identified a handful of general suggestions. These suggestions are to:

1. Continue to weigh the pluses and minuses of the current Strategic Plan, seeking ways to ensure that CSI's goal statements map to the entirety of the college mission, reflect what CSI values, and are effective in setting mid- to long-term strategic priorities.
2. At the strategic planning level, concentrate on linking findings to actions and then reevaluating those actions to assess their effectiveness. The team saw evidence of this plan-act-evaluate cycle in the program review process, but it should be extended consistently across more areas of the college. This includes linking analysis to resources.
3. Clarify the governance hierarchies, responsibilities, and accountabilities involved in CSI's strategic planning processes, data analysis, priority-setting, and ongoing evaluation of institutional effectiveness.
4. Continue to consider refinements to CSI's metrics and benchmarks to address Standards 1.B.2, 1.D.2, and 1.D.3 in the context of competing mandates.
5. Increase the level of consistent, periodic progress reporting on major initiatives and processes, with appropriate attention to document management.

PART V: Addendums

Recommendation 1: Spring 2022 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

The evaluation team recommends that the institution continue to expand assessment efforts to evaluate student learning in dual credit programs and instructional sites outside of the main campus (Standards 1.C.5, 1.C.6).

Progress on Recommendation 1

Through several key initiatives, College of Southern Idaho has made substantive progress in addressing Recommendation 1 from 2022's Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE).

A new summer conference (called "Teach Together") was developed with the specific aim of incorporating dual-credit faculty into the college's general education assessment process. The first conference, held in summer 2024, drew some 228 attendees. Of these, 158 were dual-credit instructors, representing about half of the 353 dual-credit faculty at the college. Attendance at the second annual conference this summer is expected to be even higher.

The conference program includes a review of portfolios of student work spanning CSI's general education outcomes. During the visit, dual-credit faculty largely confirmed the findings from CSI's evaluation of the event. Though their level of satisfaction varied somewhat, conference-goers reported that the portfolio review was useful in norming their assignments to the appropriate scope and rigor of CSI's general education learning outcomes. They also reported a better understanding of the "why" behind the required assessment process and, additionally, saw value in learning from other dual-credit instructors' assignments and artifacts.

Dual-credit faculty are expected to attend the conference at least once every two years, or make an alternative approved arrangement with the department chair. As an additional incentive to attend, participation can help satisfy state requirements for professional development. Still, the college is aware of barriers to attendance and, accordingly, continues to explore ways to reduce those obstacles, such as offering low-cost lodging in CSI's dorms.

The conference, however, is but one element of CSI's efforts to address Recommendation 1. To provide further support, the campus's Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) is developing an online orientation for dual-credit faculty that aims to foster a sense of identity and belonging as a College of Southern Idaho faculty member. TLC staff are also in the early development of a repository for assignments, syllabi, and artifacts — a resource that, in interviews, dual-credit faculty enthusiastically endorsed.

Meantime, CSI has recently offered faculty the option of receiving feedback on the assignments submitted as part of CSI's regular assessment cycle. While this resource stands to benefit all instructors, dual-credit faculty reported that it would be especially welcome as an additional opportunity to calibrate their assignments to the college's standards.

Finally, the college continues to invest effort in improving its peer liaison system, which links dual-credit instructors to campus counterparts. In its Mid-Cycle Self Evaluation Report, CSI candidly acknowledges the workload and distance barriers that liaisons face. But the college continues to work on solutions. For one, CSI plans to expand the availability of liaisons by increasing the number of faculty members whose contracts incorporate liaison work. The dual-credit instructors who met with the evaluation team reported that the liaison model, which includes regularly scheduled teaching observations and frequent communication and collaboration, has been effective for them. They were generally very happy with the level of attention they received from their liaisons.

As the previous paragraphs suggest, the current evaluation team saw convincing evidence of CSI's meaningful and multi-pronged efforts to address the concerns raised by the 2022 evaluators. The current team encourages the college to maintain thorough analysis and documentation of the effectiveness of its efforts, including the scope and level of faculty liaison interactions as well as dual-credit faculty participation in institution-wide assessment efforts.

Beyond matters of reporting, the current evaluators would offer a couple of additional observations. First, the team concurs with the Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report's suggestion

that CSI would benefit from incorporating quantitative as well as qualitative analysis in its assessment system, which now focuses on faculty development (improving assignments that allow students to better show their learning) rather than on assessing student mastery. Incorporating additional quantitative measures could improve the analysis of learning achievement across different disciplines and, as a corollary benefit, across dual-credit and campus-based faculty.

Second, some dual-credit faculty noted that a factor complicating their efforts to maintain campus standards is that not all dual-credit enrollees are academically ready for college-level work, despite a minimum GPA requirement. It was unclear to the evaluation team whether this was a question for CSI, the high schools, or individual instructors — or all three — to address.

The evaluation team found that CSI faculty teaching at the college's satellite campus follow the same assessment expectations as Twin Falls faculty. The visit to the Mini-Cassia campus confirmed that offsite faculty are fully aware of, engaged in, and appreciative of assessment efforts at the course, program, and general education levels.

USDE Virtual Visit Follow-Up Certification

Because the institution's Year 7 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) visit was conducted virtually, the current evaluation included an onsite follow-up certification. The required form was submitted to NWCCU concurrently with this report.