

# **Ad-Hoc/Special Evaluation**

## **Peer-Evaluation Report**

**Wenatchee Valley College**

**Wenatchee, Washington**

**April 14, 2025**

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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## Introduction

On behalf of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), the evaluation team was asked to perform a Special Report evaluation and visit to Wenatchee Valley College. The onsite visit occurred on April 14, 2025.

Wenatchee Valley College (WVC) is in North Central Washington and serves 10,000 square miles, located in three counties: Chelan, Douglas, and Okanogan. The College has two campuses, including a main campus in Wenatchee and a second campus in Omak, located one hundred miles north of the main campus and near the Canadian border. WVC offers adult education, certificate programs, and associate and bachelor's degree programs to a diverse population. WVC is a Hispanic-Serving Institution, with an award-seeking population of 45% Hispanic.

The Ad-hoc team was asked to provide a Special Report based on concerns identified by the NWCCU arising from unsolicited media information, which resulted in areas of concern. Specifically, a series of media reports maintained that women and people of color had been harassed and discriminated against. When the institution was asked to respond to these allegations, it presented additional evidence of complaints that included several instances of students being sexually harassed by faculty and reports of harassment between faculty members. There was sufficient documentation such that a team was sent on-site to review standards 2.D.2, 2.F.1, and Eligibility Requirements 7, 8, and 23.

The evaluation team did not receive a standard report from the institution; instead, they received communications (letters) exchanged between NWCCU and Wenatchee Valley College President Dr. Faimous Harrison. In addition to the letters between NWCCU and WVC, the evaluation team received links to investigative reports (media) issued by NCW Life from Fall 2024, as well as several institutional documents, including Title IX complaints and disciplinary memos.

Many stakeholders participating in the scheduled meetings and forums were unaware of the purpose of the special visit, and some individuals believed that the visit was related to a Year 6, Policies, Regulation, and Financial Review (PERF) report.

## Visit Summary

The site visit comprised several meetings and discussions with stakeholders. The evaluation team prepared for the visit by holding organizational meetings with NWCCU Senior Vice President Dr. Teresa Rivenes, reviewing letters from the NWCCU and responses from President Harrison, examining the identified NWCCU standards and eligibility requirements, and analyzing institutional documents and media reports. This was a one-day visit during which the visiting team had an extensive list of necessary stakeholder conversations to validate the institution's

compliance with the specified standards, eligibility requirements, and Title IX regulations. Additionally, the evaluation team aimed to determine the effectiveness of institutional policies and procedures for addressing Title IX (harassment, discrimination, and safety) complaints, as well as the timeliness and communication follow-up in these areas.

We appreciated the campus members' time and support for the Ad-Hoc visiting team. The visiting team would like to thank the Acting Accreditation Officer and the onsite information technology support representatives for their assistance in advance and throughout the visit. The visiting team requested meetings with a cadre of individuals throughout the institution, including:

- President's Leadership Team
- WVC Board Trustees
- Interim HR Executive Director
- Science Department Faculty
- Nursing Department
- Deans/Directors
- Faculty Union representatives
- Diversity groups
- Faculty Open Forum
- Staff Open Forum
- Student Open Forum
- Closing meeting with the President and Acting Accreditation Liaison Officer

## Standard 2.D.2:

***2.D.2*** *The institution advocates, subscribes to, and exemplifies high ethical standards in its management and operations, including 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.*

Wenatchee Valley College installed the current president in January 2023. Since then, executive leadership has implemented several initiatives to improve the operations and the perception of the fair and equitable treatment of students, staff, and faculty at Wenatchee Valley College. These initiatives include appointing an interim Human Resources Executive Director; engaging campus constituencies and college-wide meetings; acknowledging past concerns, setting future expectations, and improving training (Title IX, civility policies). The president also instituted the Collaborative Oversight Forum, composed of the cabinet, faculty, staff, and supervisors, to encourage broader college participation. Under President Harrison's leadership, the college has

also deployed an eighteen-month inclusive strategic planning process that has resulted in the first institutional vision and core values statements.

The institution's Board of Trustees strongly supports the president's work. They noted that the president keeps them informed about operations, current legal issues, and recent media attention. The Board unanimously contends that the impact of recent media stories on the external community is minimal, and they seemed reluctant to acknowledge any lingering effect of these issues on external and internal stakeholder perception and the college climate.

Feedback from faculty and staff forums and interviews with faculty and staff revealed that the media stories, legal issues, and climate concerns feel real, recent, and relevant. Several noted that there are still consequences and matters requiring attention. Faculty and staff express significant concern and anger regarding employee turnover, and a prevailing sentiment suggests that the institution does not treat all groups equally and fairly. A long history of Human Resource complaints, "disappearing into a black hole," has led to a workforce that feels it must keep its head down just to remain employed. The team noted that in some cases, it appeared the staff or faculty wanted more information on the resolution of complaints than is likely allowed by policy. Training around the complaint process should include what information complainants will receive, and when, as well as the need for confidentiality throughout the process. Though this may have been done, it would be helpful to reinforce this, as unrealistic expectations may result in additional frustrations.

Faculty, staff, and administrators consistently praised the recent changes implemented by the interim Human Resources Executive Director. Notably, they highlighted the shift from primarily online, canned training to in-person training sessions and the timely response to filed complaints and faculty grievances. Employees particularly appreciated HR's willingness to bring people together to address conflicts and solve problems. This is entirely attributed to the leadership of the interim HR Executive Director. There is widespread hope that the positive changes underway will be sustained into the future, although the interim status of HR leadership heavily conditions this hope.

Faculty and staff recognize the president's challenging work in advancing the institution's mission. However, there is widespread concern regarding budget shortfalls. The president noted that legislative information about budget adjustments is still uncertain. Nevertheless, transparent and timely communication with faculty, staff, and students regarding staffing decisions and delays in filling vacant positions may help alleviate the widespread anxiety surrounding these issues.

Student leaders are enthusiastic about Wenatchee Valley College's diversity and welcoming nature and greatly appreciate the hard work and support of their directors and administrators. Students receive information and assistance to help them feel safe at WVC. Student leaders

desire more frequent in-person communication and support from the president. For example, they would like the president to attend events at the Wenatchee and Omak campuses.

Student leaders shared that “their input has not been valued or respected”. They shared examples of at least two occasions: (a) they participated in interviews for a Student Services staff position, only to be told that the position was eliminated; and (b) although they submitted budget allocation recommendations for their clubs and constituent groups, they reported that these were “completely ignored” by Student Affairs staff and administrators. Student Government held regular meetings throughout the budget development cycle. It approved a final budget, though members reported they felt that they were being coerced into endorsing administrative decisions without any explanation from the administrators.

Overall, positive change is occurring with promising early results, but it is important for the institution to establish and sustain this progress.

**Concern:** The institution has not demonstrated a consistent pattern of addressing complaints and grievances fairly, equitably, and promptly, contributing to an environment where students and employees feel they are not treated fairly and equitably.

**Concern:** The institution has not demonstrated that management at all levels supports the fair, timely, and equitable complaint and grievance process. Currently, it rests with the Interim Executive Director of Human Resources.

## Standard 2.F.1:

**2.F.1** – *Faculty, staff, and administrators are apprised of their conditions of employment, work assignments, rights and responsibilities, and criteria and procedures for evaluation, retention, promotion, and termination.*

WVC employees (faculty and staff) were confident that they had been notified of their conditions of employment, work assignments, rights and responsibilities, as well as the criteria and process for evaluation, retention, promotion, and termination of employment. Comprehensive employment information, including job openings, policies, and procedures, is readily accessible through the WVC Human Resources website. All new employees participate in structured orientation and onboarding sessions to support their successful integration into the institution.

With a clear understanding of WVC’s prior challenges, the newly appointed Interim Executive Director of Human Resources initiated a strategic and systemic effort to restore operational integrity and build trust. This work, particularly in developing robust training programs and addressing complaints and inequitable behavior with clarity and consistency, has received staunch support from faculty and staff. In addition, coaching for supervisory personnel is now

available. As part of WVC's commitment to a safe and respectful workplace, all employees must complete mandatory compliance training on harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct. Additionally, faculty members benefit from a one- to two-day departmental orientation that further equips them for the demands of teaching and fosters alignment with academic expectations and institutional values. Employees appreciated the mandatory nature of these trainings and that they occurred in person.

Supervisors are provided the tools and support needed to manage teams more effectively. Job descriptions with signatory authentication serve as a foundation for performance evaluation. Effective performance evaluation criteria have been reinforced, encouraging frequent feedback and two-way dialogue between managers and employees. The introduction of exit interviews has provided valuable insights into employee turnover, further informing HR strategy and institutional planning. Though some employees report inconsistent application of the evaluation process, this is generally working well.

**Compliment:** The Interim Executive Director of Human Resources has done an excellent job rebuilding trust and operational integrity within the institution. Additionally, they are working to provide training for supervisors so that they are well-prepared and equipped with the necessary tools to perform their jobs.

## Eligibility Requirement 7:

***Eligibility Requirement 7. NON-DISCRIMINATION:*** *The institution is governed and administered with respect for the individual in a nondiscriminatory manner while responding to the education needs and legitimate claims of the constituencies it serves as determined by its mission.*

WVC has established consistent policies and procedures that align with appropriate state and federal guidelines for non-discrimination. Through the Acting Executive Director of Human Resources, the institution has developed a comprehensive training plan to ensure all employees receive mandatory training. The training plan was in the implementation phase during the visit. Stakeholders were complimentary of the HR Executive Director's work across the institution to ensure that the institution communicates processes, implements the policies as stated, and that complaints and/or grievances are appropriately reviewed, investigated, and/or resolved in a timely manner.

Knowledge and acceptance of responsibility for the policies are consistent throughout the institution from the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students. The institution may benefit from a periodic review process. It was noted by several stakeholders, including the Trustees and Leadership, that policies were in place during the period in which the issues under investigation occurred, but were not followed.

**Concern:** The institution does not have a consistent policy and procedures review calendar that ensures that policies and procedures remain relevant, accurate, top of mind, and effectively used.

## Eligibility Requirement 8:

***Eligibility Requirement 8. INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY:*** *The institution establishes and adheres to ethical standards in all its academic programs, operations, and relationships.*

Examples of ethical standards, policies, and ethical conduct/standards of employee conduct are posted on Wenatchee Valley College Human Resources webpages. A summary page of Washington State Law as it pertains to WVC employee conduct, with scenario examples, is posted at Ethical Standards | Wenatchee Valley College. Additionally, the 2023-2026 Collective Bargaining Agreement (Agreement Between the Wenatchee Valley College Board of Trustees and The Wenatchee Valley College Association for Higher Education, 2023-2026) addresses faculty harassment and bullying (Article 4, Employee Rights; Section J, Workplace Harassment/Discrimination).

Recent evidence, particularly regarding improvements in Human Resources practices, etc., indicates that the college is investing efforts to improve adherence to ethical standards for all employees. However, significant cultural and climate issues appear to stem from a lack of ethical standards in operations and relationships. After meetings and forums with staff and faculty, private feedback to the evaluators consistently noted divergent perceptions of the college's treatment of employees. Employees shared that people are treated differently and that "part of this difference was due to race and skin color". Perceptions by white employees tended to be more optimistic than those of employees of color, who noted privately to the evaluators that their concerns were ignored or dismissed, and some faculty do not feel politically safe. Evaluators also heard reports of disparaging comments made to employees of color (e.g., a faculty member of color was told that they were a 'diversity hire'). Among faculty, tenure status determines perception and a feeling of safety, regardless of skin color or ethnicity. Faculty who did not have tenure said they 'keep their head down' for fear of jeopardizing their access to teaching assignments. A co-sponsor of a faculty grievance against the administration claimed that the faculty's request that faculty receive harassment and civility training was not handled correctly; instead, training was provided by the academic vice president to administrators, but not to faculty.

On June 12, 2023, the academic vice president addressed all faculty and academic administrators at Dean's Day, a contractual professional development day for faculty, reviewing the policy and processes, and providing training regarding civility. In addition to the attending participants, Dean's Day was recorded and shared broadly with the entire community.



However, some reported that having the academic vice president, cited as someone who has engaged in harassment without repercussions, do the training was more hurtful than helpful.

Academic administrators feel unduly constrained by the college's collective bargaining agreement. Deans and chairs do not feel they can effectively supervise or have an avenue for providing input for collective bargaining agreement (CBA) negotiations. The chief academic officer and the faculty union president acknowledge that the agreement was liable to exploitation by knowledgeable faculty. The president is also aware of this and is committed to revising future agreements to reflect more equitable shared governance.

A science faculty reported that BIPOC students did not always feel comfortable speaking up or confident that their concerns would be addressed. WVC is comprised of 55% students of color, and though the college has policies prohibiting harassment and discrimination, stakeholders do not feel they have been consistently or effectively enforced.

Areas of institutional growth opportunities include, but are not limited to, transparency, communication, and recognition. WVC may consider providing regular institutional updates to ensure students and staff are informed about key decisions and initiatives, enhancing transparency and communication. Scheduling open forums and town halls is another way to provide visibility and allow leadership to engage directly with the campus community, fostering increased trust and accountability. Engaging regularly with the student senate and student groups may provide opportunities to support students' feelings of being heard.

The institution has structures in place, but their application is inconsistent throughout the organization. Several areas could benefit from greater attention and improvement: academic affairs, culture and operations, communications, student relations, and college governance.

**Concern:** Perceptions and feelings of a lack of transparency, communication, and consistent application of ethical standards are hampering effective relationships.

## Eligibility Requirement 23:

***Eligibility Requirement 23. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY:*** *The institution demonstrates operational capacity (e.g., enrollment, **human** and financial resources, and institutional infrastructure) sufficient to fulfill and sustain its mission. It allocates resources as necessary to achieve its mission and engages in realistic budgeting, enrollment management, and capital planning to support the achievement of its identified strategic indicators of institutional capacity.*

WVC's human resources are effectively managed to ensure the college can meet current demands while remaining agile and responding to future needs. Human resource staffing is

adequate, and data across three years indicates that high staff, faculty, and administrative turnover is trending downward.

This review focused exclusively on the Human Resources office's resources, staffing, and training. The new interim HR Executive Director has made an enormous difference. It was concerning that in the staff forum, employees stated they did not feel comfortable with the two HR staff members present. This indicates that while there may be trust in the new Executive Director, the department has room for improvement.

## Conclusion:

Institutional stakeholders generally expressed confidence, trust, and appreciation for the Acting Executive Director of Human Resources. They noted the President's commitment to addressing areas of concern and holding individuals accountable as necessary. WVC is highly engaged with the community, and faculty and staff are dedicated to student success. Students highlighted the strength of academic programming, and many are eager for transfer opportunities after graduation.

Overall, there is support for the President and Interim Executive Director of Human Resources, along with cautious optimism regarding systemic and ongoing support for training and policy adherence related to Title IX, as well as accountability among employees and leaders, and prompt responses to complaints and grievances. Accountability for compliance in the specific areas the evaluation team was requested to review currently relies on only a few individuals. The institution is facilitating the implementation of training across departments and stakeholder groups; however, institutionalizing these changes has yet to be fully achieved. For example, when stakeholders were repeatedly asked if they knew how to file complaints or grievances, the evaluation team consistently heard, "We do now."

## Recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** The evaluation team recommends that all administrators and supervisors receive ongoing quality training on ethical management, ethical operations, transparent communication, and the respectful, consistent, fair, timely, and ethical handling of complaints and grievances. (2.D.2, ER 8)

**Recommendation 2:** The evaluation team recommends that all employees receive ongoing quality training on effective workplace communication, preventing bullying, harassment, and discrimination, and how the complaint and grievance process works (including confidentiality). (2.D.2)