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WCU Career Services External Review Report

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Review Team:

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I. Introduction

a. Description of visit length

The review team, which included one external reviewer, met for a full day and dinner on December 10th and the next morning, December 11, 2009. Sessions included individual and group university representatives who were in part selected from a list of campus stakeholders and those familiar with the office provided by the Career Services director.

Constituent sessions included Review Team meetings with:

- Assistant Vice Chancellor for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness plus an additional representative from that office (introductory meeting)
- Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies
- Career Services permanent staff and graduate assistant
- Selected faculty members
- Selected students (lunch meeting)
- Meeting with allied unit staff
- Student Affairs and Enrollment Management representatives
- Career Service counseling staff (dinner meeting)
- Provost (breakfast meeting)
- 2 working sessions and an exit meeting with representatives of Career Services, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies, and Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness staff

There was also a brief introductory conference call with review team members prior to the visit initiated by the Team Lead.

b. A summary and description of meetings conducted by the Review Team

The review team members met with 42 different representatives from the university. For individual constituency group sessions, averaging an hour in length, representatives were asked 1) what their affiliation or experience was working with the Career Services staff and services utilized, 2) what they saw as the unit's strengths, 3) where they saw opportunities for collaboration needs and desire for services, and 4) their input regarding possible new directions and initiatives for Career Services. Within each meeting, individuals, in most cases, offered their personal experiences working with members of the staff and gave examples of their responsiveness, expertise, and helpfulness.

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II Analysis of Program

a. Provide a brief synopsis of the:

- i. **primary unit functions (Are they appropriate for WCU's student body)?** The Career Services staff offers a wide array of services within the full career development spectrum of career decision-making, career planning, career employment, and assessment. This includes traditional programs such as career /job fairs and targeted industry panels, a popular etiquette dinner, as well as significant outreach to classroom teachers to offer topical sessions in each of the colleges. Student employment for non-work study, cooperative education, JobCat Internet-based recruiting systems, career self-assessment testing, individual career counseling, job search assistance, web-based resources, interviewing skills assistance, and a *Career Journal* are key offerings. These services round out an array of programs provided coupled with significant consulting and career programming/information support service delivered to faculty, advisors, staff, and student groups. Key elements of the services provided include:
- intense focus on the *early developmental stages* needed to assist students in career decision-making and planning
 - significant one-on-one and in-class delivery modes are used; alternative modes such as group career counseling and assessment interpretation could be considered as the population grows and increased demands for services result
 - an array of offerings very appropriate for the student body
 - relevant interviewing and resume writing assistance; more employer outreach could be considered
 - *Experience*, or alternative career services software, has room for greater utilization, especially its tool for a centralized student resume database
 - significant outreach to academic units and collaboration resulting in valuable direct service to students

Are they consistent with professional norms or standards? Overall, the Career Services programs are consistent with professional norms and standards, and in some cases, staff go above and beyond what is expected of service to individual units. Career Services staff does an excellent job of partnering with individual faculty members. An area to explore might be how job postings are best handled to minimize possible liability for the University and to maximize opportunities for relationship building and engagement with external constituents/employers. (A small note in reviewing the brochure text is that, by national definitions, cooperative education opportunities are always paid.) Perhaps clearer university definitions of internships and co-ops might be delineated. By all accounts reported to the Review Team, students, faculty, and staff gave numerous examples of how the services were delivered with quality, reliability, flexibility, and high ethical standards. The Career Services staff initiated assessment on their own utilizing the CAS (Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education) standards resulting in a very realistic valuable assessment of the services showing significant strengths in meeting expectations and some opportunities for growth in the future.

- ii. **unit's programming activities and/or services (Are programming activities and services appropriate to stated mission and objectives? Are programming and services adequate to meet the expressed needs of the constituent groups?)**

Key points regarding programming:

- The array of services offered is appropriate to missions and objectives of the unit.
- Major strengths the Review Team saw are in individual delivery systems and partnering with faculty for meeting student needs through the classroom and advising systems.

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- There are job development and employer outreach opportunities for further development though currently they are very responsive to tailoring career fairs and panels to targeted group needs and volatile economic conditions.
- On-campus interviewing and expanded career forum opportunities might be expanded. Given the location and industry base in the area, the staff has capitalized on the interview/fair combined forum format.
- An area of concern is the support of QEP and the ability to deliver services within the context of increasing demands. This is a significant strategic direction in support of multiple university collaborative efforts. Significant staff and budget increase would be needed to carry this out if the expectation is for every department to have an experiential QEP and Career Services is to serve as a support, opportunity database management, and information resource.
- Staff are attending to professional development and 21st-century skill needs among their student populations (i.e., individual interview coaching and use of software tools such as the *Perfect Interview*).
- There is an opportunity to maximize the recruiting software tool.
- Due to WCU's location and size of the student body, more partnerships with employers could be sought but it would not be reasonable to expect this engagement to yield a large on-campus recruiting program.
- While the career development, job search, and employer relationships and services are certainly above adequate, more connections with employers and intern opportunities could be made through alumni, mentors, partnering with service sites, and development office supporters.

iii. planning and assessment strategies (Can the unit document that its programming activities and services are having the intended effect? Are programming activities and services routinely evaluated and results used to make improvements? Do all staff members have an opportunity to participate in planning and assessment activities?)

Impact and assessment key points:

- Use of CAS standards was helpful in the overall office review and assessment of service offerings though this would not be expected as an annual exercise.
- Use of routine evaluations for career fairs yields good quantitative and qualitative results.
- Staff utilizes UNC sophomore and senior surveys as opportunities for engagement.
- The Review Team recommends integration of more systematic learning objectives for individual programs and 2 to 4 standard learning objectives to be included in the evaluation of service offerings. These could include statements for individual programs such as: "... as a result of using this service, I have learned what is expected in the interviewing process and personally feel more confident and better prepared", coupled with a Likert degrees-of-agreement scale. Across the board measure could include: "... as a result of participation in the service, I have increased my knowledge base about career options."
- Partner with admissions or external relations to develop a "brag" sheet on what students do and how they use Career Services (excerpts from the Career Journal would be good for this. Share more on student outcomes internally and externally). Champion and showcase key faculty partners. Career Services staff could more fully utilize the information on graduates collected by the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness.
- It is not known how many professional development webinars staff participate in, but this would be a recommendation. However, each staff member should be interacting, sharing, and learning with colleagues in 2-3 face-to-face conferences or professional meetings a year.

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III. Analysis of Staff

a. Qualifications – Provide a brief analysis of staff qualifications (i.e. Do the unit staff have the requisite degrees/credentials and skills appropriate to the program?)

Staffing points:

- Both professionals are Master's degree incumbents. This is appropriate for EPA level qualifications. Both appear to be active in advancing credentials and their skills base and are personally flexible and engaged.
- Given the size of the student body, additional career counseling staff is needed with Master's level training.
- Given the scope of responsibilities and duties, a director and associate director position would be most appropriate. Mike Despeaux is currently carrying out the duties typically associated with an associate director (versus coordinator).
- Event planning and student employment level positions are appropriate. In this field, background requirements for these positions vary widely, from less than a bachelor's to a master's degree being required. However, the skills and experiences of current incumbents are appropriate to the duties being carried out.
- The Review Team would like to make special note here that the personal attributes, skills, and characteristics exemplified by the individuals on the staff were praised across the board by individuals with whom we met. It is not just the service offerings that make this unit a success, but the tone, responsiveness, and professionalism of the staff. Mardy Ashe's length of service, commitment, and dedication to the institution as well as her strength in leadership were also noted numerous times.

b. Resources and Support – Provide a brief analysis of unit and institutional support for staff (i.e. Does the unit have adequate and appropriate processes? Is compensation appropriate and adequate? Does staff have access to adequate technology resources?)

Key points:

- Staff salaries are below average for comparable institutions and services, especially given the incumbent staff members years of experience. The Review Team views the unit as being understaffed in regards to expectations of service offerings, delivering to multiple constituents, and to multiple educational levels of the student body.
- Staff members have solid counseling backgrounds and experience in the College Student Personnel discipline.
- Each member possesses professional and personal attributes to work with a wide range of individual faculty interests and employer groups.
- The Review Team recommends a director, associate director, and 2 new assistant director positions (new ones to be created for further job development, external relations, utilization of job posting software and resources, and another to help support growing demands for QEP academic department needs).
- In regards to technology resources, more assistance (perhaps technology GA) will be needed if the office is to take on a central information source role for QEP. Staff members have made use of a few quality tools in the field (i.e., Perfect Interview, eRecruiting, Discover, online SII and MBTI assessments). It appears that central IT provides the support needed but current database software is not obviously being used to capacity. The Review Team also recommends looking for ways that

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students can easily access JobCat through eBriefcase (the new *Experience* gadget may be a good tool to explore).

c. Professional Activity and Service – Provide a brief analysis of staff participation in professional development and university service (i.e. Do staff have adequate opportunities for professional development? Are staff recognized by their peers for professional contributions to the field? Do staff engage in an appropriate level of University service?)

Key points:

- Staff members provides significant engagement and service to University committees and sister units.
- Staff member partnering closely with units, such as service learning and advising, is evidenced and important.
- Staff involvement in more national associations is likely limited by travel funds. As state resources increase, funding for state, regional, and national travel is also recommended (NACE, SoACE, CEIA, NCDA).
- Further opportunities might be offered in the office for supervising graduate students from the College Student Personnel program. Staff members are encouraged to partner even further with graduate students for article submissions to professional journals and presentations at conferences. Currently, a good opportunity is provided for one student each year through the graduate assistantship.
- As the University grows in the expectations and need to support QEP grows, another area to explore is the use of peer career assistants to help with outreach, publicity, group mock interview programs and resume critiques.
- As the student body and QEP expectations grow, the breadth of duties expected of the administrative assistant may also need to be reviewed.

IV. Analysis of Operational Facilities and Budget

a. Does the unit have adequate facilities to fulfill its mission?

- No, in fact, this is the smallest career office the external reviewer has ever seen.
- While many career centers across the country have cut back on physical libraries, there are indeed excellent career tools that can only be offered through this vehicle as they are not available online.
- The Review Team recommends additional space at minimum for employer meetings, student worker/GA office, and a career lab for students. This also provides a better opportunity to offer select resources to the community. It is important to note that Career Services offices are part of the external impression often made by the university to key constituents.
- The space is not adequate to meet the current or growing needs of the program.
- Facility Overview: Western Carolina University's Career Services and Cooperative Education Career Services and Cooperative Education is currently housed in what could be classified as the west wing of the 2nd floor of Killian Annex. This wing is comprised primarily of the Registrar with a small space left for the unit. All the permanent staff members of the unit have individual offices/work areas in the space. The director, special events coordinator, career services coordinator, and student employment specialist each have individual offices. There is another office used by a graduate assistant which also serves as a break room, interviewing room, storage, and work room. An administrative support specialist and a student employee occupy the common area of the unit. There

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is no reserved space for individual meetings with students or other clients. When a space is needed, the staff members use a table in the common area of the 2nd floor of the building or reserve a room in another part of the building or campus. *Physical expansion of the unit is a must; at least 50% more space needed.*

Space is limited on campus, but new buildings have been planned especially with the recent development of a new area of campus called the Millennium Campus. As these buildings are erected and departments occupy them, space will become available. Career Services and Cooperative Education should be one of the first in line as this process occurs. In the meantime, there is the opportunity to open a satellite office in the University Center. The main concourse of the university's student center housed a coffee shop called Java City. The location was no longer needed as other coffee options came to campus and the space is currently unoccupied. While the space is not large, the fantastic location next to the university's primary clothing and gift store and across from the post office would increase the unit's visibility and any additional space would be helpful.

b. Does the unit have adequate budget to fulfill its mission?

- The budget is not adequate to meet the needs for support staff or programs (i.e., software purchases or professional travel). As the student population increases and QEP implementation increases, there is also need for additional funding for career assessment licenses unless it is expected that students will pay for these, in which case, more administrative assistance for processing fees is needed.
- Center staff may want to explore additional software tools such as Optimal Resume/Optimal interview and Inter-folio for credentials.
- needs funding for laptops and newer computers as well as lab space integrated into the unit

V. Summary of unit strengths and areas for improvement

a. What is your general impression of the unit?

Key points:

- The Career Services unit offers a full array of quality services.
- Staff are very professional and dedicated and have demonstrated strong credibility among constituents across campus.
- There is a general awareness of the unit across campus and the unit is held in positive esteem. There is also an opportunity to raise visibility and value added with deans and upper levels of university administration.
- Career Services has developed a reputation for strong core program offerings, career self-assessment, and job search assistance.
- The current focus is on career development and job search processes appropriate to the unit and alignment with undergraduate studies (energies should not be spent adding a full layer of programs targeted for graduate level students or alumni, but only a few select programs/ career panels).
- The inclusion of the student employment function allows for critical visibility of the service offerings early among students but the growth and intense administrative requirements of this program will call for additional support.

b. Overall, what are the areas of strength?

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- Individualized personal service, attention, and responsiveness of staff which could be challenged as the student population grows and the QEP expectations increase.
- Career Services and Cooperative Education was applauded for its flexibility, openness, approachability, and understanding the faculty. Comments were made such as: "... they are a good resource for educating us."
- Good use of current funding provided.
- Good faculty relationships and partnerships.

c. Overall, in what areas could the unit make improvements?

- Need to increasingly consider other delivery modes for services such as the use of group career counseling and utilizing the College Student Personnel program, and development of a peer career assistant program.
- There is an opportunity to maximize the functions of the *Experience* recruiting software and a full central resume database.
- The unit could participate or support a university wide effort to track experiential learning and showcase student experiences.
- The Review Team sees an opportunity for further incorporation of reporting on learning outcomes, for an annual executive summary or highlight report, and other means to showcase Career Services activities/students/employers to the University community including partnership highlights, program offerings, student usage numbers, and employer activity.
- Initiate or collaborate with Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness to conduct an expanded annual post-graduation survey of graduates' activities. This includes base information on the feedback of value of services and reported employment and salary data (and/or use what has been collected). This information will be critical to the support of the next SACS accreditation for ALL units and could have increased value if measures are included for assessing academic or institutional learning outcome goals for students (WCU 5 global goals).
- Given WCU is one of the targeted schools through UNC General Administration for how technology can better and more seamlessly work with the community, include the Career Services director in these discussions.
- Consider further leveraging the student employment program: require resumes, develop online training for supervisor and share best practices.
- Expand visitation to employers and employer outreach as staffing allows.
- Explore select career service program offerings for graduate students.
- Offer "Hidden Job Market" series.
- Explore NC ACTs for service co-ops.
- Better facilities for service delivery and external image building for the university.

VI. Summary of Recommendations

PART A. For Current Role Career Services Plays:

Strengthening current services:

The center, as currently configured, has very limited staff which appears to be highly efficient and effective in achieving their stated mission. With continuing increases in student enrollment, it appears that there could be an expectation of maintaining or increasing services to an increased student body

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without added personnel. This will require the staff to consider additional, or alternative, venues to make their services available. The Review Team recommends considering some combination of peer career mentors/counselors, group career counseling, and/or utilizing graduate students from the College Student Personnel program to assist with delivery of services. As mentioned prior, staffing, facilities, and operations funding support all need to be addressed.

The Review Team recommends that the center staff explore ways to maximize the *Experience* recruiting software which they use. Increase the emphasis for students to use the software as a repository for resumes and other relevant recruiting/interviewing artifacts. Additionally, the student employment processes could incorporate the use of the recruiting software by requiring all student worker applicants (work-study and non-work study) to have a resume on file. This would help create awareness among the students of the tool as well as get them used to maintaining a current resume in the database. The availability of this recruiting software could also be leveraged by exploring the establishment of liaisons (or redefined roles) in each of the colleges who can promote the use of the service. Another avenue to make the center services available to more students could be through the use of on-line programming using podcasts, wikis, and/or blogs to share internship experiences, interviewing techniques and best practices.

In addition to using greater utilization of the *Experience* recruiting software, the Review Team recommends that the center explore ways of collaborating with Service Learning to make greater utilization of opportunities offered through NC ACTS and NC Campus Compact, particularly as it relates to cooperative education experiences already offered. This opportunity seems to fit nicely with Western's theme of an engaged university as well as the QEP.

The Review Team recommends that the Center initiate or collaborate with the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness to establish an ongoing process of annual post-graduation surveys of alumni. This would stand to create a database of information that would be helpful for individual colleges as well as the university as it approaches various accreditation processes. It also would assist the center staff as they work with current and potential employers. Care should be exercised to form the information that is gathered to assist with assessment issues around academic and/or institutional learning goals.

Lastly, as staff can find time, travel to continue developing relationships with employers and potential employers would enhance regional awareness of the center's availability as well as of the university. With the current staff and workload, this will be a challenge.

Communications:

The Review Team assumes that publications from Career Services which are available to the public would need to be vetted in a manner similar to other University publications to ensure that they are presented in as professional a manner as possible. (The *Career Journal*, for instance, contains errors and the photos it uses are of students who do not necessarily reflect well on the University.)

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Communications and Visibility on Campus:

Career Services has an increasingly important role to play in a tough economy, both for current students and alumni. Career Services develops good quality programs that often go unattended by a significant number of students.

In order to increase effective communications and faculty promoting programs, the “faculty liaison” that was mentioned earlier should be revisited and restructured to make it a more serious function. Perhaps one per department is too many, but x number per college would be more manageable, e.g. the College of Education and Allied Professions, with five departments, could provide two faculty liaisons.) The leadership team in each college could also take some responsibility for improving communications.

In terms of visibility, Career Services may be able to use more student workers and liaisons to help get the word out to the campus to advertise upcoming events and programs. The Review Team suggests having a Career Services table set up in strategic locations prior to events to advertise the events. For example, a table could be set up in the lobby of Killian, Reid and Karpen Hall (at UNCA) prior to the education career fair (say, a couple of weeks, then a week, then the day before the event). Individuals working in those buildings, such as work-study students and graduate assistants, could possibly be partners to assist with tables and distribute information.

Explore securing a space in the University Center as a satellite office, so students can see “Career Services” on a regular basis and be provided information regarding specific and general career options.

Enhancing/Expanding services:

One area where the center may consider enhancing current offerings is in the area of job search seminars. The Review Team recommends the center consider offering a seminar series on "The Hidden Job Market" that would focus on the fact that 75% of jobs that are filled are never advertised. These jobs are filled by word-of-mouth and networking.

The center currently focuses primarily on services to undergraduate students related to career preparation and interview readiness skills. The Review Team recommends that perhaps the center consider identifying a couple specific groups of the graduate student population where these same basic services may be most needed. Some graduate programs are primarily focused on the working professional, e.g. Master of Accountancy, Master of Project Management, where the job search is not as critical, while some other graduate programs could perhaps benefit from services the center offers.

PART B. For expanded Career Services support role for QEP

Enhanced visibility

- Provide visibility for career services staff at higher levels.
- Include head of the unit in discussions with individual departments regarding development of their QEPs.
- Provost and Deans work to appoint experiential learning champions to campus-wide council or committee to provide overall policy and program definitions (i.e., QEP Program Policy Committee).

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This could be co-lead by a faculty member and head of a re-defined career, service and experiential learning unit. Perhaps recommend this to be part of faculty governance.

Staffing

- At least two additional professional EPA, and one administrative support staff will be needed. As the institution grows, it is best to have one Career Services professional person to be a liaison, along with one QEP liaison, *for each* college (Service Learning Fellow model is a good one to consider).
- The center will need to consider funding for peer career assistants or graduate assistants to do career services and program outreach for students while professional staff focus on classroom and academic unit support. The center will need at least one specialist who does more travel to sites and perhaps as a part-time office in Asheville (space to be provided by one of the large area employers or nonprofit sites?) Current WCU offices on the Enka campus of ABTech are perhaps where this person could be located.

Integrating Technology

- Develop program database and standardized employer/sponsor participant agreement forms reviewed by legal counsel.
- Further integration of technology software packages, technical support and new computers will be needed to help maintain tracking for university QEP purposes.
- Incorporate a small lab/ workstations for career technology instruction.

Integrating Experiential and Intentional Learning

- In the longer-term, consider the integration of Service Learning, all student employment (on and off-campus) and career services into one unit headed by Executive Director or higher-level position.
- Further collaboration with the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning would be helpful in delivering experiential learning forums.

Support for Programming

- Develop information for the University website for QEP to include training and support documents for departments.
- Form an advisory board consisting of key faculty and external sponsors from all different types of programs (i.e., internship, co-op, service, part time jobs, on campus employment).
- "Career Service's Plus" to work with Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (OIPE) for their support in regular documentation and surveying of program outcomes for QEP measures.

Other

- Set expectations for student involvement as part of a requirement for graduation. (This would involve academic advisor assistance. The Elon University model is good for this.)
- Additional space in central location (refer to facility section).

The Review Team members appreciate the opportunity to be part of this process and look forward to seeing the assistance this report may provide to the Career Services Office and the university.