

March 14, 2022

TO: Northwest College Board of Trustees

FROM: Lisa Watson, Interim President

RE: Northwest College Transformational Change

Overview

Northwest College is a comprehensive community college approved to provide certificates, associate, and bachelor of applied sciences degrees. The College was formed in 1946, the second of eight community colleges and one university created to serve Wyoming's citizens.

Factors

Over the past ten years, Northwest College has faced ongoing and harmful declines in revenue from;

- State and local funding: The State of Wyoming has a long history of dependence on the extraction industry as a primary source of income to sustain governmental operations. For decades Wyoming revenue has gone through periods of boom or bust due to this dependence. These boom and bust cycles affect state appropriations and counties' assessed valuations, directly affecting local college funding. Since 2014, the State and local counties have experienced three bust cycles, resulting in budget cuts to the College. Millions of dollars in reductions eliminated academic offerings, student support services, and needed facility improvements. Over seventy-five positions were lost, resulting in skeleton crews and compensation levels far below market midpoints.
- Enrollments: Colleges and Universities nationwide have experienced declining enrollments. The declining population of high school students, increased competition, expansion of dual and concurrent programs, online program growth, and the current devaluation of education are factors contributing to these declines and are expected to continue. Northwest College has experienced substantial enrollment declines primarily from traditional-age students (18-24), historically the most prominent student group served.

Campus Response

In 2015-2016, Northwest College revised its mission statement, further defining its purpose for existing and the focus that the College sought to accomplish daily. The mission statement is;

In the context of our global society, the mission of Northwest College is to be student-centered; be forward-thinking; cultivate community; prepare students for transfer, career, and life; and retain and graduate students.

Upon reviewing the mission statement in relation to the transformational effort, the trustees and campus community found the mission to be well understood and followed.

In 2015-2016, Northwest College developed a vision statement with a five-year timeline. The vision, *“Innovation and distinction in experience, connections, and environment,”* included several key performance indicators to measure improvement over time and was presented annually to the Board of Trustees and campus community.

In 2019, the College President met with the Board to begin work on a new strategic vision and discuss the effects of the last budget reductions on the campus. Discussion within the administration and the campus community also centered around the previous cuts and a desire to implement steps to minimize future reductions to programming and operations. Strategic visioning sessions were held, and in conjunction with existing economic and enrollment factors, the Board and the College President agreed that the timing was right to move forward with an initiative focused on transformational change. The national consulting firm, CampusWorks, was retained to assist with this effort.

It is important to note that in March 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic was spreading worldwide, causing sickness and disruption. The College was not immune to the effects of the pandemic and prioritized its operations in response to the pandemic, resulting in delays to the transformational work.

Process

Over the past 18 months, more than four hundred voices from our community, foundation, alumni, legislators, faculty, staff, students, and trustees contributed to the visioning and discussion on transformational change. Data collection and analysis were completed on enrollment, marketing, academic programming, college finances, and other campus efforts.

During this review, we noted the impressive work recently completed in career and technical programming, the newly instituted bachelor's program, enrollment processes, shared governance, budgeting, policy, scheduling, and campus maintenance. This work reflects extensive transformational efforts that have already occurred and are ongoing.

As part of the visioning effort and data analysis, four core ideas were identified that could differentiate the College, bring value, and be persuasive to our audience. They consisted of;

1. The Destination Model
2. The Pathways Model
3. The Workforce Hub Model
4. The Distinctive Program Model

Outcomes

With the completion of the community visioning, the data analysis, discussions on operational and programmatic modeling, and future factors associated with higher education, the Trustees and the College can see the opportunities that a transformational vision and strategy can bring.

As part of the discussions, overwhelming feedback suggests that the College continue implementing best practices and expand enrollment and marketing efforts. These efforts can be delineated within an action plan. Still, the plan could include expanded consulting support, staffing changes, additional

programs to increase enrollment leads and marketing outreach, website redesign, rebranding, and possibly renaming. As pointed out in the October 2021 panel discussion on rebranding and renaming, the transformational vision must be decided before any work commences on rebranding or rebranding/renaming.

When reviewing the four core idea models, campus feedback suggests support for a hybrid distinctive programming model designed to include our community, workforce, and destination programming opportunities. The value of pathways was acknowledged, noted to have elements in place already, and supported as an ongoing process that helps students, recruiting, and retention efforts. There was also strong recognition regarding our unique destination and varying ways to capitalize upon this including programs or services that capitalize on unique historical, geographic, cultural, or economic locale.

Finally, when focusing on the future vision of the College and what it wants to become, sustainability must be included as we envision our strategic future. This vision should strive to have healthy enrollment levels and various revenue streams generated from academic programming and experiences that appeal to students.

Funding

The College has worked over the past 18 months to secure one-time funds that can support this initiative. These funds are held in a restricted account and are not part of the unrestricted reserves. These funds could be utilized upon recommendation of the President and approval of the Board through the existing budget process.

Motion

These efforts have brought forth high-quality discussions and an opportunity for the Board of Trustees to focus on the implementation of a transformational vision for the College.

The Board is requested to consider the following;

1. Move to support a transformational vision - Distinction and destination of place.
2. Motion to support the development of a sustainable ten-year strategic plan. This plan will develop measurable goals by August 31 that will operationalize the transformational vision and reflect College efforts to enhance;
 - a) Academic programming
 - b) Support services that include enrollment and marketing efforts which, among other things, may consist of rebranding or renaming.

These motions will set forth Northwest College's vision, conclude the transformational initiative, and charge the College in developing its strategic plan to turn the vision into action.