Preface

The Self-Study Process and Report

This self-study report has been drafted explicitly for the purpose of reaffirmation of accreditation of Colorado State University (CSU) by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and presents a snapshot of the institution at a specific time (Fall 2011 through Spring 2013). Since the last site visit (2004), CSU has experienced declining state resources and changing of presidents in the midst of a rapidly changing environment for higher education. In the face of these challenges, CSU has maintained a strong commitment to provide high quality programs and services by conscientiously evaluating priorities and efficiencies to become a stronger institution.

The Process

This self-study report focuses primarily on evaluating how well CSU meets the HLC accreditation criteria and documenting supportive patterns of evidence. This exercise provided an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of institutional policies, procedures and practices; and to identify strengths, concerns, and challenges that must be addressed before becoming crises or missed opportunities.

The strategic planning and subsequent budgeting process have matured over the past decade to serve the University’s needs with annual updates and periodic major reviews every three years. This process has provided the framework for decision-making at CSU, resulting in a continuous series of incremental changes in the pursuit of excellence. Therefore, the self-study process was designed to rely heavily upon existing processes and organizational structures to document and evaluate the effectiveness of administrative policies and procedures that guide decision-making.

The self-study process for collecting evidence and analyzing institutional performance was purposefully designed to fit within continuous quality improvement structures and processes (including benchmarking as appropriate) that are already in place and to be consistent with the strategic planning processes. Therefore, the Strategic Planning Area Review Committees (SPARCs) were chosen as the major self-study units. Each SPARC is assigned specific goals within the Strategic Plan. In 2011, as the self-study began, the SPARCs were charged to refresh the Strategic Plan by recommending modifications, including additional goals, strategies, and metrics for improving institutional performance and benchmarking accomplishments in addition to the annual review of institutional accomplishments in fulfillment of the Strategic Plan. The SPARCs' broad membership includes representation from most campus constituent groups and key administrative leadership. All members of the President’s Cabinet served on one or more SPARC. Each SPARC also includes one or more of the college deans and representatives from the Faculty Council’s Committee on Strategic and Financial Planning, the Administrative Professional Council, and the Classified Personnel Council.

At the start of the self-study process, the components and sub-components of the HLC criteria were cross-matched with goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan and assigned to the respective SPARC(s) with responsibility for oversight of the topic. Evidence was expected to be identified for each component to assess accomplishments. The following materials served as foundational information resources used in drafting the SPARCs reports: the departmental program reviews, administrative and academic support unit reviews, specialized accreditation reviews, assessments of program objectives, Institutional Research data and reports, and strategic planning activities that evaluate the effectiveness of programs to guide resource allocation and other administrative decisions. Analysis of the evidence led to an assessment of the adequacy of institutional performance and achievement that was characterized as follows: weaknesses/challenges, accomplishments/progress, and strengths/successes to be celebrated (sometimes labeled in SPARC reports as red, yellow, or green progress). Strategic and/or budgetary plans and changes were recommended for improving institutional performance.

The SPARCs are expected to identify strengths as well as targets for improvement since a major goal of the process is continued institutional improvement. Patterns of evidence are sought that demonstrate how effectively CSU meets the HLC criteria by documenting accomplishments, focusing on the past 2-4 years, and noting new opportunities within CSU’s mission for future activities and accomplishments. Activities in progress or planned are included to keep a future-oriented emphasis in the self-study report. As appropriate, the self-study shows how the

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institution has changed or is changing as a result of the self-study findings.

In summary, the SPARCs structure and process was chosen because it fulfills many of the attributes of an effective self-study process as described in the HLC Handbook of Accreditation:

- Fits the distinctive nature of the organization.
- Ensures effective evaluation of the whole organization.
- Promises to have an impact on the organization beyond the Commission visit.
- Engages multiple constituencies of the organization.
- Builds naturally on existing and ongoing self-evaluation processes.
- Has strong presidential and board support.
- Draws on the expertise and credibility of recognized leaders throughout the organization.
- Maintains regular and effective communication links with organizational constituencies.
- Produces evidence to show that the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation are met.

The self-study has been drafted from the SPARC reports and other institutional documents into a comprehensive and cohesive report that incorporates discussion and guidance from the coordinating committee and feedback from constituents. The report is organized to summarize the information necessary for the evaluation visit, the review process, and Commission action.

**Participants in the self-study process (Spring 2013)**

**Self-Study Leadership Team**

Coordinator:
*Robert Jones, Professor, Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Pathology, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences*

Committee members:
Natalie Anderson, Graduate Student Council representative (preceded by Erin Hicks, Marilyn Magenis)

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*Self-Study Executive Committee*

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Jason Johnson (Co-Chair), Deputy General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel

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Kathy Partin, Director, Research Integrity and Compliance Review Office

Anita Pattison, Administrative Professional Council

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Lori Bates, Classified Personnel Council
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Organization of the self-study report
The **Introduction** section provides a brief history of past accreditation activities, significant achievements during the past 10 years, and a summary of actions taken in response to the 2004 site visit report.

The **Criteria for Accreditation** section contains the five HLC criteria as major headers and each component of the criteria as secondary headers. An introduction is provided for each of the criteria and then evidence is provided under each core component to provide assurance that CSU fulfills the expectations of the component. The argument for each component is constructed using the HLC sub-components and a few additional institutional topics as sub-headings. Finally, a summary is provided for each criterion that indicates how well CSU fulfills the criterion, along with examples of institutional strengths, challenges, and plans for enhancement drawn from the body of the self-study and the *Strategic Plan*.

The **Federal Compliance** section documents that CSU meets or exceeds the minimum requirements of HLC’s Federal Compliance policies.

The **Application** section is CSU’s formal application for affirmation of accreditation and other institutional attributes incorporated into its Statement of Affiliation Status. This report demonstrates that CSU operates at a level of excellence that meets or exceeds all requirements for accreditation.

The self-study report and virtual resource room were organized and managed using the Accreditation module of Compliance Assist®.