



# Overview of the University of Wyoming and Introduction to the Self-study

“The University of Wyoming aspires to be one of the nation’s finest public land-grant research universities. We serve as a statewide resource for accessible and affordable higher education of the highest quality; rigorous scholarship; technology transfer; economic and community development; and responsible stewardship of our cultural, historical, and natural resources.”

—*University of Wyoming Mission Statement (2009)*

## THE UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING, THE DIVERSITY OF ITS LEARNERS, AND THE CONSTITUENTS IT SERVES

(Core Components 1a, 1b, 1d, 5a, 5c, 5d)

The University of Wyoming, located in Laramie, opened its doors in fall 1887 when Wyoming was still a territory. The institution was officially established by the territorial legislature in 1886 to “provide an efficient means of imparting to young men and young women, on equal terms, a liberal education and thorough knowledge of the different branches of literature, the arts and sciences, with their varied applications.” Funded as a land-grant institution, the university’s early administrations worked quickly to establish programs in agriculture, mining, and other practical disciplines to comply with the Morrill Act. (1a) In *Wyoming University: The First 100 Years, 1886-1986*, author Deborah Hardy commends the founding faculty members with this account of their responsibilities: “The position of professor at the University of Wyoming in the early years demanded breadth, specialization, administrative ability, classroom discipline, a willingness to travel, research interests, talent in public relations, and generally, great good humor.” University of Wyoming faculty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century might conclude that this summary remains an accurate characterization of their complex academic lives.

Since the university’s inception, it has grown from 42 students and four degree programs to more than 13,000 students with access to 79 undergraduate degrees, 59 master’s degrees, 30 doctoral degrees, an Education Specialist degree, the Juris Doctor degree, the Doctor of Pharmacy degree, and 15 certificate programs. It is

## UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING MISSION STATEMENT, MARCH 2009

The University of Wyoming aspires to be one of the nation's finest public land-grant research universities. We serve as a statewide resource for accessible and affordable higher education of the highest quality; rigorous scholarship; technology transfer; economic and community development; and responsible stewardship of our cultural, historical, and natural resources.

In the exercise of our primary mission to promote learning, we seek to provide academic and co-curricular opportunities that will:

- Expose students to the frontiers of scholarship and creative activity and the complexities of an interdependent world;
- Ensure individual interactions among students, faculty, and staff;
- Nurture an environment that values and manifests diversity, free expression, academic freedom, personal integrity, and mutual respect; and
- Promote opportunities for personal growth, physical health, athletic competition, and leadership development for all members of the university community.

As Wyoming's only university, we are committed to outreach and service that extend our human talent and technological capacity to serve the people in our communities, our state, the nation, and the world. The primary vehicles for identifying the specific actions and resource allocations needed to accomplish this complex mission are the university's strategic plans, revised periodically.

home to seven academic colleges: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, Engineering and Applied Science, Health Sciences, and Law. The university also includes two schools, the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources and the recently established School of Energy Resources. Its academic core is enhanced by the American Heritage Center, the Art Museum, the University Libraries, and a variety of specialized collections, several having national or international significance. The university has also extended its service to the state through its Outreach School, which delivers 20 undergraduate and 12 graduate degree programs at the University of Wyoming Casper College Center and through its distance learning delivery systems. The university maintains nine outreach education centers across Wyoming and Cooperative Extension Service centers in each of the state's 23 counties and on the Wind River Indian Reservation. (5a)

While Wyoming is the ninth largest state in the United States, encompassing 97,914 square miles, it supports the nation's smallest population of slightly more than 500,000 people. Since the university's beginning, the state legislature has consistently resisted efforts to establish a second state university, choosing instead to support seven community

colleges. The Wyoming State Legislature continues to be unique among the 50 states in supporting only one provider of baccalaureate and graduate education. As a result, the University of Wyoming is a primary recipient of state and federal funding for research and education. According to the 2008 *State Higher Education Finance* report by the State Higher Education Executive Officers, the university leads the nation in state funding for higher education. Approximately 43 percent of the university's budget comes from the state legislature. In return for this support, the residents expect broad services and expertise. (5d) The university is the academic partner to state government and the state legislature, providing research and knowledge for government initiatives. (1b, 1d, 5c) It also has close connections with the seven community colleges, the Wind River Tribal College, and the state's 48 public school districts. Planning efforts are instrumental in the university's efforts to provide for a variety of constituents' needs while maintaining its high quality performance standards.

## Organization, governance, and administrative structure to promote effective leadership

(Core Components 1d, 1e)

The University of Wyoming is governed by its Board of Trustees, consisting of 12 voting members appointed by the governor with the consent of the Wyoming State Senate. The governor, the state superintendent of public instruction, the president of the university, and the president of the Associated Students of the University of Wyoming (ASUW) serve as ex officio members. (1d) The presidents of the faculty and staff senates hold non-voting seats at the table. The university's president oversees the work of the provost and vice president for academic affairs, several directors, and five vice presidents who have responsibility for administration, research and economic development, information technology, institutional advancement, and student affairs. Faculty and staff senates and the ASUW also participate in the activities of institutional governance. (1e) For additional information on the organizational structure, see Appendix A.

## A snapshot of the university, 2008-2009

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classifies the University of Wyoming's undergraduate profile as full-time four-year with a selective enrollment, a high transfer-in rate, and a high graduate co-existence. It classifies the doctoral graduate programs as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) dominant. Overall, the university has high research activity. The following statistics, based on the academic year 2008-2009, further describe the university.

- Total university enrollment: 13,106
- Outreach enrollment: 3,065 (UW Casper College Center: 542; statewide outreach: 2,523)
- Full-time enrollment: 9,254
- Average undergraduate class size: 29
- Student-to-faculty ratio: 14 to 1

- Undergraduate enrollment: 9,603
- Fall-to-fall retention (Fall 2007 new freshmen): 72%
- Graduate and professional enrollment: 3,503
- Undergraduates over 25-years-old: 22%
- Non-resident student enrollment: 27%
- Minority student enrollment: 9%
- New, first-time freshmen: 1,693
- Six-year graduation rate (Fall 2002 new freshmen): 53%
- New transfers: 984
- Degrees awarded: 2,437
- Full-time instructional faculty: 715
- Faculty holding the highest degree in their field: 82%
- Benefitted employees: 3,006
- Increase in extramural funds over the past decade: 88%

## A THEMATIC SELF-STUDY ON ENRICHING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

### (Core Component 4a)

In the past decade, the university has experienced unprecedented levels of financial support from three sources. 1) With its wealth derived from a boom in the extractive industries, the state legislature has invested heavily in the university through such avenues as increased block grant funding, endowed scholarships to students, endowed professorships, capital construction, and matching funds for major gifts. 2) The University of Wyoming Foundation surpassed its goals for a major capital campaign and has continued to attract millions of dollars in gifts and commitments. 3) University faculty have secured record amounts of funding through federal and foundation grants. This self-study is an analysis of how those resources are being utilized to benefit the institution and Wyoming citizens. Our theme of enriching the learning experience focuses on how well the university has integrated effective learning experiences, for all stakeholders, with the overall growth it has experienced during this decade. (4a)

### The self-study process

#### (Core Components 1d, 1e, 2d)

The university began planning for its self-study process in 2007. After careful consideration and consultation with our Higher Learning Commission (HLC) staff liaison, the commission granted approval for a thematic self-study. This report, entitled *Enriching the University of Wyoming Learning Experience: A Thematic Self-study*, is intended to evaluate the effectiveness and extent of the learning opportunities within our research-intensive university environment for students, staff, faculty, administration, and external

constituencies. The report also presents evidence to support the university's continued accreditation, and it will be used to communicate to its stakeholders (both internal and external constituents) the university's accomplishments and capacity for future performance. (1e)

The self-study was initiated concurrently with the development of the university's third planning document, University Plan 3, and was completed subsequent to the Board of Trustees' approval of *The Creation of the Future: University Plan 3, 2009-2014* (UP 3). President Buchanan laid the groundwork for UP 3 in his fall 2006 convocation speech by outlining three motifs: improving *access* to higher education, fostering *excellence*, and cultivating *leadership*. Because these motifs became the organizing principles for UP 3, the self-study organizers proposed a thematic self-study around these motifs within the context of three subareas: undergraduate education, graduate education, and professional and lifelong learning. After vetting the idea with university leaders and in consultation with HLC staff, the university decided to engage in this thematic self-study to tie its planning, budgeting, and accreditation efforts together. (2d)

The university's self-study process officially began in spring 2008. The Office of Academic Affairs provided the overall leadership for the self-study process, with Associate Provost Abernethy serving as chair of the HLC Self-study Steering Committee. The committee consisted of nine co-chairs leading ad hoc self-study subcommittees created for this thematic process. The committee also included representatives from the Office of the President, Office of Institutional Analysis, Office of Academic Affairs, the University Libraries, the Division of Student Affairs, and others. President Buchanan invited identified faculty, staff, and administrators to serve on the nine subcommittees. The HLC Self-study Steering Committee members are identified in Table 1.1. Each of the nine subcommittees consisted of four to nine members with more than 60 total participants. (1d) For a list of subcommittee members, see Appendix B.

The HLC Self-study Steering Committee met twice a month beginning in spring 2008 to discuss issues and ideas related to the self-study. The nine subcommittees, led by their respective co-chairs, met regularly in person and communicated via email. Numerous faculty, staff, and students contributed information and their perspectives through discussions, interviews, and surveys conducted by members of the HLC Self-study Steering Committee and the nine subcommittees.

The Office of Academic Affairs regularly updated the Board of Trustees on the self-study process, and it provided information to the university community via its Web site and assessment newsletter. In September 2009, the steering committee invited the entire university community to review and respond to a draft of the self-study. Associate Provost Abernethy and committee members organized several group discussions of the draft with faculty, staff, and students, and individual responses were collected electronically and in hard copy. In addition, the university sent postcards to Wyoming residents inviting them to review the self-study on the Web site and to make comments.

Table 1.1. HLC Self-study Steering Committee

Name	Unit
Rollin Abernethy	Academic Affairs (Committee Chair)
Penne Ainsworth	College of Business
Chamois Andersen	Haub School, Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources
Wendy Bredehoft	University Art Museum
Mark Collins	Division of Administration
Maggie Farrell	University Libraries
Andy Hansen	College of Engineering and Applied Science
Sue Koller	Office of Institutional Analysis
Beth McCuskey	Residence Life & Dining Services, Wyoming Union
Jane Nelson	Ellbogen Center for Teaching and Learning
Erika Prager	Office of Academic Affairs
Kim Reichert	Office of the President
Don Roth	Graduate School (former)
Mary Scott	Information Technology
Robert Scott Seville	Outreach School
Audrey Shalinsky	College of Arts & Sciences
Dorothy Yates	Office of Research & Economic Development

Source: Academic Affairs

## Organization of the self-study

This self-study consists of 12 chapters organized in four sections. In Section 1, we introduce the university, characterize the self-study process, and explain the university's planning process. Section 2 contains the self-study proper on enriching the learning experience. Section 3 contains additional evidence that the university is meeting the criteria and core components for budget and federal compliance issues, which are outside the theme of our self-study. Section 4 contains a request to alter our statement of affiliation status in relation to the delivery of distance learning. Most of the chapters conclude with a list of our most significant findings highlighted in the self-study. We also note where key findings align with action items in UP 3.

### Section 1

The three chapters of Section 1 underscore the importance of the university's extensive planning processes. Chapters 2 and 3 and Appendix C are intended to serve as a frame for the self-study that identifies the university's emphasis on planning and assessment.

- Chapter 2 contains a summary of *Taking Stock: Reflections on a Decade of Planning* (2009), a document in which the university published the results of two cycles of

planning and assessment. In Appendix C, we include the text of *The Creation of the Future: University Plan 3, 2009-2014*, which is the planning document that governs the next five years of university activities.

- In Chapter 3, we continue the taking stock theme by highlighting the university's progress with the nine specific issues and recommendations from the reaccreditation visit in 2000.

## Section 2

The self-study theme of enriching the university learning experience is presented in Section 2, consisting of Chapters 4 – 9. The basis for evidence provided in these chapters was informed by student and faculty surveys, department and program annual reports, institutional data, and annual academic plan and support services plan reports following the last reaccreditation self-study in 2000.

- In Chapter 4, we discuss university faculty and lecturers. We focus on several efforts to increase the quality of the workforce to enrich learning.
- In Chapters 5 – 7, we study the undergraduate program, emphasizing the themes of access, excellence, and leadership with a focus on scholarships, recruitment, and transition programs. In Chapter 6, we examine the significant work the university has devoted to quickly engage students in learning. In Chapter 7, we study how the university has enriched undergraduate student learning. We end by explaining and evaluating the university's work on assessing student learning.
- In Chapter 8, we study the graduate program, again focusing on issues of access, excellence, and leadership. We highlight the role of university planning and examine the role of graduate student teaching and research. An assortment of funding issues is also examined.
- Finally, in Chapter 9, we study the university's role in lifelong learning throughout the State of Wyoming.

## Section 3

Section 3 contains three chapters that present additional evidence outside of the thematic focus on enriching the university's learning experience.

- In June 2009, the governor mandated a 10 percent cut in all state agency budgets, a reduction in funding that is expected to be maintained for several years. In Chapter 10, we outline the university's budget structure and explain how we are managing these reductions through our planning processes in order to preserve our gains and minimize the impacts of budget reductions on the institution's academic core.
- Chapter 11 documents the university's compliance with federal law related to higher education.
- In Chapter 12, we provide a brief conclusion with our request for reaccreditation.

#### ***Section 4***

Section 4 consists of the university's request that the Higher Learning Commission change its statement of affiliation to allow delivery of distance programs without seeking prior commission approval. Distance learning is now a significant part of the university, managed by a fully developed Outreach School that delivers numerous degree programs and certificates.

#### **Additional documentation and supporting materials**

The University of Wyoming self-study and accompanying appendices are available online. In addition, the university has provided a variety of additional documentation and supporting materials to assist readers in understanding key statements made within the self-study. These additional resources are also available online. The university decided on this online format in order to reduce the amount of paper associated with printing and because it would be easier to update these documents in the future.

The university Web site for accreditation can be found at [www.uwyo.edu/accreditation](http://www.uwyo.edu/accreditation). Readers may download the entire self-study in PDF format or view and print individual chapters. All supporting materials are organized by chapter and are listed in the order in which they appear in each chapter. This format allows the reader to select specific sections of the self-study without having to review the entire document. The accreditation Web site is a public site accessible to everyone. As such, the documents and supporting materials on this Web site were chosen because they are both relevant to the content of the self-study and appropriate for public viewing. Additional documentation will be available to the HLC evaluation team in the site visit resource room.