

February 7, 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 certificate, 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 been faced with a multitude of longstanding and ongoing factors, including;

- Volatile revenue: The State of Wyoming has a long history of dependence on the extraction industry as a primary source of income to sustain operations. For decades Wyoming revenue has gone through periods of boom or bust due to this dependence. These boom and bust cycles also affect counties whose assessed valuations vary wildly, affecting local revenue sources.
- Decreased funding: Since 2014, the State and local counties have experienced three bust cycles, resulting in budget cuts that directly affect the College. Millions in operational cuts reduced academic funds and facility improvements. Over seventy-five positions were lost, leaving skeleton crews and compensation levels far below market midpoints in many cases.
- Decreased 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 all factors contributing to these declines. Northwest College has experienced substantial enrollment declines primarily from traditional-age students (18-24), historically the most prominent students served.

Campus Response

In 2019, the President met with the Board to review the upcoming strategic vision efforts and the effects of the last budget cuts on the campus. Discussion within the administration and the campus community also centered on a desire to implement steps to minimize future reductions to programming and operations. As a result of the strategic visioning sessions and existing economic and enrollment factors, the Board and the 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 a three-phased initiative using collective visioning, external and internal scanning, and transformational decisions and kickoff. 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 had to prioritize those efforts, which resulted in delays to the transformational effort.

Over the past 18 months, more than four hundred voices from our community, alumni, legislators, faculty, staff, students, and Board have contributed to the visioning and discussion on transformational change. Data collection, analysis, and review were also completed on enrollment, marketing, academic programming, college funding, and other campus efforts. As part of this review, we noted the impressive work done in career and technical programming, the Bachelor's program, enrollment processes, shared governance, budgeting, policy, scheduling, and campus maintenance, suggesting that transformational efforts have been made.

As part of the visioning effort and data analysis, four core ideas were identified that could differentiate the college and be meaningful and 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

Detailed information and numerous discussions were held in the fall of 2021 covering the pros and cons of each model, if they should stand alone as specific models, or if the College could see its efforts designed around a combination of two or more of these models.

Outcomes

With the completion of the visioning, the data analysis, and the operational and programmatic modeling discussions, and when considering the College's factors, the Trustees and the College can see the opportunities that a clear transformational strategy can bring.

As part of the discussions, overwhelming feedback suggested that the College continue its efforts to follow best practices and expand enrollment and marketing efforts. These efforts can be delineated as part of the action plans. Still, they could include expanded consulting support, staffing changes, additional programs to increase enrollment leads and marketing outreach, website redesign, rebranding, and possibly renaming.

One thing that has been highlighted and emphasized is that the transformational strategy drives the work needed around branding and that this will then drive the marketing efforts. As pointed out in the October 2021 panel discussion on rebranding and renaming, the transformational strategy must be decided before any work commences on rebranding or rebranding/renaming efforts.

When reviewing the four core idea models, campus feedback suggested support for a hybrid distinctive programming model designed to include our community, workforce, and destination programming opportunities. Pathway efforts were noted to be in place and support campus recruiting and retention efforts. There was also a strong recognition of our unique destination.

Funding

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

Motion

This effort has brought forth high-quality discussions and an opportunity for the Board of Trustees to focus on the vision of transformational strategy for the College.

The Board is requested to consider the following;

1. Move to support a transformational strategy focused on distinction. These efforts may include services and programs that are seen as distinct either through experience or instruction.
2. Move to support a transformational strategy focused on destination. These efforts may include programs that capitalize on our destination as a unique historical, geographic, cultural, or economic locale.
3. Move to support expanded enrollment efforts and best practices to retain and grow enrollment.
4. Move to support expanded marketing efforts tied to the transformational strategy and enrollment efforts which could include:
 - (a) Support further efforts around rebranding and alignment with the transformational strategy.
 - (b) Support other efforts around rebranding/renaming to determine if a case for support or no support exists in alignment with the transformational strategy.

This motion will set forth the roadmap for transformational change, concluding the transformational initiative and allowing the College to develop specific action plans supporting this strategy.