Responsive and Responsible Leadership

SONNY RAMASWAMY, NWCCU PRESIDENT

"Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity."
Martin Luther King, Jr.

As a scientist and educator, I have been inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr.; his words ring more true today than ever before.

The faculty, staff, students, and administrators at our institutions—members of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) family—are the ones who can address and mitigate the danger of ignorance and stupidity.

In today’s environment of public and political skepticism, higher education as a public good is becoming a hard sell, considering the $1.48 trillion in student loan debt. This situation has come to pass in America starting in the 1980s, further exacerbated by the economic crisis of the last decade. Eroding support has contributed to rapidly rising costs of education—up almost 250 percent during the last three decades—thus shifting greater financial burden on to students and families. Indebtedness in America—averaging more than $37,000—continues to escalate.

Students graduating later and then struggling to find jobs that pay well or are in line with their educational credentials and expectations, are additional threats to higher education. College education continues to be worth the investment; indeed, college graduates earn about twice as much as high school graduates, have greater career mobility, and realize a better quality of life. Collectively, the social and political situation, waning public support, and significant budget challenges are making it difficult for academic institutions to achieve their mission. Development and application of effective, formative accreditation approaches that could contribute to tangible improvements in student performance and graduation rates could help mitigate concerns about higher education expressed by the public, funders, parents, and students.

Since coming on board July 1, 2018, I have spent time learning about the Commission, and one of the most significant sources of enlightenment for me has been the recommendations from NWCCU’s 2017 Annual Meeting and Task Force Report from Town Hall Meetings held during late 2017 and early 2018, including, but not limited to: simplified reporting; staff liaisons; technology to support institutional engagement; training; communication; alternative reaffirmation processes; and transparency. Work on these recommendations has already been initiated and/or deployed, which will be spotlighted in a dashboard on our website. This inaugural issue of The Beacon is in response to the feedback for better communication and engagement with our stakeholder institutions.

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Reflecting on these recommendations, my vision is to work with the NWCCU Commissioners and staff to create a dynamic organization that fosters excellence in educational quality, supports institutional effectiveness, and ensures that constituent institutions establish and achieve clearly defined, appropriate, and locally relevant educational objectives, focused on the core aim of promoting student success, i.e., graduation on time, with minimal indebtedness. My intent is to create and implement a formative, i.e., developmental, approach in working with institutional leadership to achieve this vision, rather than a summative or punitive process.

With persistent institutional budget challenges and the push across America to focus on graduation rates—bright lines, as they say in the federal government, Washington, DC-based think tanks, and others—it’s critical that NWCCU re-affirms its raison d’etre as an accrediting body. We will seek ways to increase accountability and affordability, and we will deliver on the promise to support constituent institutions’ success in helping their students graduate on time and with relevant knowledge and skills, such that they become contributing members of society.

NWCCU will be transparent, responsive, and stakeholder-driven in helping our constituent institutions develop and adopt best practices in advising and mentoring, data analytics, providing students relevant social context, relevant courses, and experiential learning. Working with institutional leadership, we will promote evidence and data-driven approaches for students to attain excellent grounding in core areas of liberal arts and humanities and in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math disciplines, along with experiential knowledge in their area of expertise—for example, by applying problem-based active learning and/or competency-based learning—with grounding in knowledge of environmental and natural resources issues, in addition to their social relevance. This will include collecting and providing best practices in helping students develop the technical and experiential skills, writing and communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, professionalism, morality and ethics, digital and quantitative competencies, and the ability to live and work in a diverse society.

The value proposition—i.e., of success and reputation—for accreditation is promoting ways to enhance graduation rates, while reducing the cost of education, particularly amongst underserved groups, based on a renewed and vigorous commitment to student success. This will require approaches to enhancing the cognitive and non-cognitive skills of students through learner-centered experiential opportunities. In light of recent national conversations around standards and bright lines, and in accordance with the United States Department of Education’s regulations and our Bylaws, NWCCU is beginning its cycle of review for its Eligibility Requirements (“ERs”), Policies, and Standards of Accreditation (“Standards”).

I am huge fan of responsible and responsive leadership, embracing and thriving on the complexity and diversity of our stakeholder institutions. NWCCU will convene conversations during the next several months in partnership with our family of institutions to help develop a revitalized standards and accreditation effort that results in modern, relevant, formative, effective, and applicable standards for the various types of institutions within NWCCU—large, comprehensive universities to four-year and Tribal and community colleges to private and public colleges to faith-based and for-profit institutions. These efforts, we hope, will contribute to better student outcomes, as a result of institutions defining the problem and goals for improvement, creating their data collection and measurement plans, analyzing results and their deviations from expected outcomes, continuously improving upon their plans, and developing quality controls for ongoing processes. I look forward to this effort unfolding over the next many months. In the inimitable words of Mahatma Gandhi, “you may never know what results come of your actions, but if you do nothing, there will be no results.”

SAVE the DATE
Annual Meeting
November 14, 2018;
DoubleTree Hotel and Conference Center,
SeaTac, Washington

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE
NWCCU has implemented a Salesforce-based system and additional technology to manage its accreditation records and activities. Streamlined substantive change submissions and electronic payments have already been rolled-out and as part of this effort institutions will soon be provided institutional portals to manage communications and approved program offerings. Training for the new system will be provided at the Annual Meeting, with additional webinars to follow.
Greetings colleagues,

On behalf of the NWCCU Executive Committee and the entire Board of Commissioners, I am pleased to share with you this inaugural edition of the NWCCU Newsletter, The Beacon. We remain committed to providing current and transparent updates on achievements and future plans, and we invite your feedback and participation.

2018 has been a year of significant transformation for NWCCU as we implement substantial changes to advance the interests of our accredited institutions and their campus communities. So far this year, the Commission has engineered a number of attainments and has initiated several constructive endeavors, including:

- Appointed new Commissioners to the NWCCU Board of Commissioners;
- Revised the NWCCU Bylaws to incorporate a much-needed committee structure;
- Transformed the Commission’s technology infrastructure and resources;
- Added essential software capabilities with enhanced administrative processes to dramatically improve communication, efficiency and data security;
- Digitized NWCCU archives and records of action;
- Launched a completely revised, updated and user-friendly website;
- Instituted regional listening sessions with representatives from our accredited Colleges and Universities to inform the Commission on needed improvements and potential opportunities;
- Reengaged with our peers at the Council for Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) to collaborate and promote the interests of regional accreditation;
- Renewed our affiliation with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and we are currently pursuing recognition.

With the inspired leadership of Chair Jean Floten and expert guidance from Academic Search, NWCCU conducted a successful search process and appointed a new chief executive officer, President Sonny Ramaswamy. Dr. Ramaswamy officially took the reins in July 2018.

Finally, under the brilliant leadership of Interim President Marlene Moore and the dedicated Commission staff, NWCCU submitted its petition for continued recognition to the United States Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education Accreditation Division, appeared before the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), and received recommendations for the maximum five-year recognition by the United States Secretary of Education with no outstanding concerns.

Please save the date and plan to attend the NWCCU Annual Meeting on:

**Wednesday, November 14, 2018** at the **DoubleTree Seattle Airport and Conference Center** in Seattle, Washington.

In addition, the Commission will be hosting several Town Hall meetings throughout the region to keep our accredited institutions abreast of emerging developments and changes that impact higher education.


Representing the Board of Commissioners, I look forward to engaging with you as we collectively pursue excellence in serving our institutions, our students, and our communities. Thank you for your continued encouragement and contributions.

Sincerely,

Joe Brimhall, Chair
Board of Commissioners
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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**Assessment Essentials: Assuring Standards of Educational Effectiveness and Quality Improvement**

NWCCU has partnered with Jillian Kinzie, PhD, Associate Director of the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Institute and Senior Scholar at the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) project to design two one-day on-site trainings around best practices in assessment. The first 8-hour seminar will be offered at UNLV mid-January 2019 and is open to all NWCCU members. Seating is on a first-come-first-serve basis and all institutions are strongly encouraged to send an institutional representative. Registration will be forthcoming on the NWCCU website.
DR. ROBIN BAKER
George Fox University

Robin E. Baker, a historian and experienced university administrator, is the 12th president of George Fox University. Prior to his appointment in July of 2007, he spent eight years as the university's provost, overseeing a dramatic expansion of academic programs including undergraduate programs in engineering and nursing. The University has grown to more than 4200 students providing undergraduate and graduate preparation for people primarily in the Northwest.

Previously, Dr. Baker began his career as a history professor at Wheaton College and served at several universities in the Southwest. He completed a Ph.D. in Civil War and American Political history with honors at Texas A&M University in 1989.

Dr. Baker is honored to be given the opportunity to serve as a NWCCU Commissioner. It is his primary goal to help the Northwest Commission navigate a period of dramatic change in higher education. He hopes to use his skills and knowledge to help the Commission to continue to develop a higher education system that is accessible, accountable and focused on completion.

DR. SUSAN CAPALBO
Oregon State University

Dr. Susan Capalbo is the Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Professor of Applied Economics at Oregon State University (OSU). She received her Ph.D. in Agricultural and Resource Economics from the University of California, Davis, and has been a Professor at Montana State University, a Fellow at Resources for the Future in Washington D.C., and a visiting ADVANCE Fellow at Columbia University. Dr. Capalbo currently serves as chair of the Steering Committee for OSU’s Strategic Plan and is a member of the National Academy of Sciences’ Board on Agriculture and Natural Resources. Her research focuses on valuing the benefits of public goods and services and the natural capital that supports our ecosystem services. Dr. Capalbo maintains that “[b]ecause the public benefits of education are difficult to quantify, we experience continued underinvestment in this infrastructure that is fundamental to transforming lives. As a NWCCU Commissioner, I hope to provide leadership to better quantify and communicate the value of our higher education system and to enhance the effectiveness of delivering and sustaining inclusive and innovative learning environments.”

NEW COMMISSIONER HIGHLIGHTS

MARLENE MOORE, NWCCU PAST PRESIDENT

During my work as a campus academic officer, NWCCU evaluator, commissioner and interim president, I was guided by the axiom that we must learn to measure what we value, or, we must value what we can measure. It is not easy to measure student learning, yet, it is what we value most. And although measuring student learning is not an exact science, some indicators are better than others and can guide improvement in practice. The commitment to the process of determining meaningful indicators of student learning and achievement, and using those indicators to drive improvement is what I value most about regional accreditation.

Sonny Ramaswamy made it clear during the presidential search process that his interest in regional accreditation was in its ability to help improve student learning. His record of achievements demonstrated that he hasn’t avoided difficult issues, on the contrary, he has embraced challenges. There are many challenges ahead for regional accreditation and many political pitfalls. I’m confident that NWCCU will be a beacon leading the way through troubled waters because of President Ramaswamy’s focused commitment to the education of our students.
**DR. JAMES YOUDE**

Dr. James Youde received his Ph.D. degree in Economics from the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Youde has held several positions in economics and in food and agriculture including as the Executive Director of the Western United States Agricultural Trade Association, President and later Chairman of the Northwest Economic Associates, and Acting Director and Chief Deputy Director of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. He also served as the Extension Economist for the University of California, Davis, as well as a being a professor at University of California, Davis, and at Oregon State University. Dr. Youde states that “as a NWCCU Commissioner, I bring 52 years of public-sector and private-sector experiences to the Commission decision-making process. This unique set of experiences should give the public confidence that Commission decisions will consider all points of view in holding all Northwest member colleges and universities to the highest levels of certification, and that the Commission affairs will be managed in an efficient manner.”

**NWCCU STANDARDS REVISIONS**

In accordance with its Bylaws, NWCCU will launch a comprehensive review of its Standards beginning September 1, 2018. A survey will be sent to institutions and available on the NWCCU website and a series of Town Halls have been scheduled to gather feedback from faculty, staff, students, and the public.

- **September 24** – Alaska - University of Alaska – Fairbanks
- **September 25** – Montana - University of Montana – Missoula
- **September 28** – Idaho - Boise State University
- **November 5** – Nevada - UNLV
- **November 6** – Oregon - Portland State University
- **November 7** – Utah - Brigham Young University
- **November 14** – Washington - NWCCU Annual Meeting at DoubleTree Hotel and Conference Center, SeaTac, WA

Feedback from the regional surveys and Town Halls will guide deliberations by the Board of Commissioners, who will issue draft revisions in Summer 2019 for additional public comment. Final revisions will be voted upon by the Board of Commissioners in November 2019 and implemented in January 2020 following to-be-scheduled trainings for regional members. If you have questions please contact Dr. Mac Powell, Senior Fellow, at mpowell@nwccu.org.

**DR. BOGDAN HOANCA**

University of Alaska—Anchorage

Dr. Bogdan Hoanca received his Ph.D. degree from the University of Southern California in Electrical Engineering. Currently, Dr. Hoanca serves as Interim Dean in the College of Business and Public Policy (CBPP) at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). Before being asked to serve as Interim Dean, he was the Director of Graduate Programs in CBPP. His faculty appointment is as Professor of Management Information Systems. As a faculty member, Dr. Hoanca’s accreditation efforts as a tri-chair of the UAA Accreditation Leadership Committee were focused on the University’s role as a pilot institution for the new standards introduced at NWCCU in 2010. Commissioner Hoanca views regional accreditation as an essential peer review-based process that ensures academic quality and student success. By serving on the Commission, he hopes to increase and make more visible the value accreditation offers to institutions through sharing of best practices, continuous improvement processes, and transparent communication with external stakeholders. Higher education is facing numerous challenges, including a loss of trust from the public and from employers; changes in the job market due to automation and offshoring of jobs; a focus on technical skills at the detriment of liberal arts education; new educational models including micro-credentials and competency-based education; and new financial and organizational partnerships between higher education institutions and non-educational entities. Some of these challenges require the Commission to reconsider assumptions and expectations in order to adapt and better serve the needs of the member institutions, the students, and the general public.

**New NWCCU Website Disclosure for Member Institutions**

As follow-up action to institutional feedback received in the Town Hall listening sessions held in late 2017 and early 2018, and in accordance with the Commission’s policies for accountability and public disclosure, Title IV eligibility, and the standards of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, NWCCU will begin publishing excerpts from institutional notification letters following Commission meetings. Such letters of action will identify why an institution is accredited, what non-compliant issues may exist as determined by the Commission, the standards associated with non-compliant issues, and any follow-up monitoring required. Starting September 1, 2018, NWCCU will begin adding these excerpts as “Accreditation Actions” with a link to institution names on the NWCCU website directory.
Seeking Proposals and Presenters - NWCCU Webinar Series

Over the past year, NWCCU has solicited feedback from member institutions about how we can best facilitate institutional success. A need identified by the membership is for more educational programming to advance the quality improvement efforts of institutional members to achieve their missions serving students. To that end, NWCCU has developed a comprehensive educational program which will launch in October with our first free webinar dedicated to institutional mission fulfillment. The webinar will highlight best practices in the region along with critical updates. We are seeking proposals and presenters for each of the quarterly webinar topics below:

- (October) Successful Practices in Assessing Student Learning to Demonstrate Mission Fulfillment (Proposals due September 1, 2018)
- (January) Successful Practices in Assessing Program Student Learning Outcomes (Proposals due December 1, 2018)
- (March) Successful Practices in Increasing Student Retention (Proposals due February 1, 2019)
- (May) Successful Practices in Using Technology to Assess Student Learning Outcomes (Proposals due April 1, 2019)

Please assist us by forwarding this information to individuals within your institution interested in facilitating a webinar presentation that would showcase successful practices on your campus. Use this link to complete the form for submitting a proposal for presentation.

https://form.jotform.com/81975290484165 If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Valerie Martinez (vmartinez@nwccu.org) or call (425) 558-4224.

NWCCU DATA TRENDS

Between Spring 2014 and Spring 2018, 848 Recommendations were cited during Year Seven evaluations. The donut chart identifies how many recommendations were cited within each Standard.

Two-Year and Four-Year institutions face different needs and challenges. This chart looks at the amount of recommendations Two-Year institutions received compared to Four-Year institutions.
Mission Fulfillment Fellowship

NWCCU has designed an Mission Fulfillment Fellowship Program to be offered by regional and national thought-leaders. The Fellowship is designed to help institutions implement best practices in retention, assessment, and planning for the changing landscape of higher education. Featured speakers include: Peter Ewell, Trudy Banta, Jillian Kinzie, Cyd Janefsky, Natasha Jankowski, Stephen Hundley, and other luminaries in the field. More information is available on the NWCCU website, and applications are now available on the NWCCU website and are due no later than December 15, 2018. If you have questions, please contact Dr. Mac Powell, at mpowell@nwccu.org.

Meet the Staff

Ruth Bedford
Executive Assistant to the President

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Senior Vice President

Elsa Gossett
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Valerie Martinez
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