

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN  
EASTERN WYOMING COLLEGE AND THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION  
ON A SPECIAL EMPHASIS SELF-STUDY OPTION FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE  
EVALUATION SCHEDULED FOR 2010-2011**

**SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON:  
The First Year of College**


**Purpose**

Eastern Wyoming College is committed to student success. In furtherance of this commitment, EWC has embarked upon the Foundations of Excellence® process to enhance the first year of college. The college is submitting a Special Emphasis Self-Study Plan which outlines the institution's process for focusing on the first year of college and addressing the Criteria for Accreditation. This memorandum describes EWC's participation in the Foundations of Excellence®--in the First Year of College as a part of the self-study. It provides evidence of institution-wide ownership and commitment to expected outcomes of the special emphasis on the first year experience. It also describes the mutual intentions, expectations, and commitments made by EWC and the commission pertaining to the special Emphasis Self-Study proposed by Eastern Wyoming College.

**Eligibility and Background**

**1. Brief description of the institution including its Carnegie Classification.**

Eastern Wyoming College is a two-year state-supported, comprehensive community college. It offers programs leading to associate of arts and science degrees, applied associate degrees and certificates. EWC's Carnegie Classification is listed below:

 The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

**Eastern Wyoming College**  
Torrington, Wyoming

Level: 2-year

Control: Public

Enrollment (Fall 2004): 1,418

**Classification Category**

Undergraduate Instructional Program: Assoc: Associate's

Graduate Instructional Program:	(Not applicable)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enrollment Profile:	ExU2: Exclusively undergraduate two-year	<input type="checkbox"/>
Undergraduate Profile:	PT2: Higher part-time two-year	<input type="checkbox"/>
Size and Setting:	S2: Small two-year	<input type="checkbox"/>
Basic:	Assoc/Pub-R-S: Associate's--Public Rural-serving Small	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Fall 2007 enrollment was 1558. Fall 2008 enrollment has not been calculated at this point.

## 2. Summary of the institution's accreditation relationship with the Commission.

Eastern Wyoming College was granted correspondent status in 1969. This status was continued for one year in 1970. In 1972, the College was granted Candidacy status. EWC has been accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) since 1975. The most recent comprehensive accreditation visits were in 1991 and 2001. The next comprehensive visit is scheduled for 2010-2011.

The 1990-1991 visit resulted in the next comprehensive evaluation being scheduled for 2000-2001, with three interim reports to be filed regarding the institutional long-range plan and full response to Criterion Three. These reports were submitted in 1993, 1995, and 1997. Each report was accepted by NCA staff, but the College was required to submit an additional report (the planning document) in 1998. This document was accepted.

The 2000-2001 visit resulted in the next comprehensive evaluation being scheduled for 2010-2011, with a progress report to be filed by February, 2004 regarding the team's concerns as follows 1) the implementation of a comprehensive strategic plan that includes enrollment management strategies which are directly linked to the fiscal year budget, 2) whether feedback data are being used to improve student learning in courses and programs, and 3) if progress has been made toward assuring that all general education faculty have appropriate credentials and that the general education component of the AAS and certificate program contains recommended amounts and levels of general education.

In 2004, Eastern Wyoming College responded to the 2001 team's concerns regarding 1) a strategic plan, 2) use of assessment data to improve student learning, 3) credentials of faculty teaching general education, and the 4) general education component of AAS and certificate programs. The HLC accepted and reviewed the report and indicated that no

further reports were due until the institution's next comprehensive evaluation which is scheduled for 2010-2011.

In January, 2005, the institution submitted a Request for Institutional Change in order to offer four complete degree programs via distance. The focused visit occurred in April 2005 and that team recommended the HLC Institutional Actions Council extend accreditation to include distance delivery of Associate degree programs in Interdisciplinary Studies, Criminal Justice, and Business Administration.

### **3. Institutional Mission**

New mission and vision statements were developed in Spring 2008 and officially adopted by the EWC Board of Trustees in June, 2008. The mission and vision follow:

#### **Mission Statement**

Eastern Wyoming College is a student-centered, comprehensive community college that responds to the educational, cultural, social, and economic needs of its communities with quality, affordable educational opportunities for dynamic lifelong learning.

#### **Vision Statement**

Eastern Wyoming College will be a dynamic center for education, acting as a catalyst for individual growth, community engagement and global impact.

Along with the institutional work on mission and vision, the college undertook a new strategic planning process. As such, five strategic directions were developed along with several vital initiatives for each direction.

#### **Strategic Directions and Vital Initiatives**

##### **Strategic Direction #1 - Thoughtfully prepare our organization and our people for changing and dynamic times.**

- **1.1** Encourage professional development at all levels.
- **1.2** Implant opportunities for administration, faculty, and staff to share thoughts; enthusiastically support progressive ideas benefitting one another intellectually and emotionally.
- **1.3** Standardize and document college practices and processes.

##### **Strategic Direction #2 - Promote high quality, accessible learning experiences through responsive programs of distinction aligned with current & future opportunities.**

- **2.1** Provide, develop and implement high quality programs.
- **2.2** Grow programs known for excellence and responsiveness to market needs.

- 2.3 Seize and expand opportunities for outreach and distance education.
- 2.4 Provide enhanced student learning experiences through opportunities for achievement and recognition.
- 2.5 Pursue alternative financial resources that position the college to be responsive to opportunities.

**Strategic Direction #3 - Embrace and invest in technology and modern facilities.**

- 3.1 Implement the use of leading edge technology for instruction and operational efficiencies.
- 3.2 Create an environment that is user-friendly and responsive to growth.
- 3.3 Provide modern, progressive, and inviting living environments for students.
- 3.4 Design facilities that will accommodate changing technology, and that will utilize resources in a responsible manner.

**Strategic Direction #4 - Enhance the quality of life for individuals, families, the community and region, and positively influence the economy.**

- 4.1 Strive to be a focal point of the community.
- 4.2 Expand educational and training activities for regional businesses and industries.
- 4.3 Develop mutually beneficial partnerships that respond to the needs of business and industry.

**Strategic Direction #5 - Recognize and extend our global reach.**

- 5.1 Encourage diversity among students, faculty, staff and administration.
- 5.2 Provide all students and employees with opportunities to expand and meet challenges of an ever-changing world.
- 5.3 Promote global awareness by committing to innovative practices and programs that protect the world's future.
- 5.4 Promote the college locally, nationally, and internationally.
- 5.5 Embody the practices that will lead to a respected, progressive institution of higher learning.

**4. Recent background of the institution that set the stage for the emphasis on the first year.**

Eastern Wyoming College has been interested in the success of its first year students and developed a freshman orientation class, College Studies, which is required of all certificate and degree seeking students. In addition, the college has a new student orientation day that is typically held just before fall classes begin. The Student Retention Team focuses on students who are at risk because of a variety of factors and follows through by assigning these students to a SRT advisor in addition to their regular academic advisor. In the Spring of 2008, Eastern Wyoming College applied to the Foundations of Excellence® in the First Year of College and was one of ten two-year colleges accepted into the program. A group of ten attended the launch

meeting held in Asheville, North Carolina in August, 2008. Once they came back, a steering committee was developed and an overall college presentation was made at the fall 2008 in-service. Co-chairs were named for each of nine dimension committees and employees and students volunteered to serve on the committees. A timeline was developed for the year, and a student survey and a faculty/staff survey were developed. Both of these surveys will be administered this fall. This project has been embraced and supported by administration, faculty, staff, and students as a way to review and then improve the experiences of new students who choose to attend Eastern Wyoming College.

### **Collaboration and Preliminary Submission**

#### **1. Description of the institution's discussions about the desirability of a special emphasis self-study.**

The College is ultimately interested in becoming an AQIP school. In fact, an application was filed with the Higher Learning Commission in April and a group of eight from the College attended the AQIP Colloquium at the Higher Learning Annual Conference. However, the timing of the application, along with a leadership transition, caused the request to be denied. Since we had already been approved to participate in the Foundations of Excellence® program, they suggested to us the possibility of a special emphasis self-study. In addition, John Gardner from the Foundations of Excellence® policy institute called us to visit about the memorandum of understanding they have with the Higher Learning Commission and encouraged us to make the Foundations of Excellence® in the First Year of College our primary emphasis for our upcoming self-study. He provided us with names of other colleges who have worked to link their accreditation self-study to their Foundations of Excellence® project. The College's leadership team discussed and endorsed the application to the Higher Learning Commission to pursue a Special Emphasis self-study on the Foundations of Excellence® in the First Year of College.

#### **2. Descriptions of conversations with the Commission about a special emphasis self-study.**

Members of the group that traveled to Chicago attended a session on preparing a special emphasis self-study. In a conversation with Stephen Spangehl following the denial of our AQIP application, he encouraged us to explore the possibility of the Special Emphasis Self-Study which would involve the Foundations of Excellence® in the First Year of College. Stephen further encouraged us to continue down the road to AQIP even if it was a postponed journey, and said the Foundations of Excellence® project is a quality improvement project that would involve the entire college. In a follow-up conversation with our institutional HLC liaison Andrew Lootens-White, he explained to us the process that would be followed to apply for permission to pursue a special emphasis self-study. Andrew Lootens-White then sent us a template and an example of a college which had prepared a memorandum of understanding with the Higher Learning Commission.

### **Definition of Special Emphasis**

By participating in the special joint program created by The Policy Center for the First Year of College and the Higher Learning Commission, Eastern Wyoming College elects to:

1. Approach the first year in ways that are intentional and based on a philosophy/rationale of the first year that informs relevant institutional policies and practices.
2. Create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year involving all functional units that have responsibilities for first-year students.
3. Deliver intentional curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution's philosophy and mission.
4. Make the first college year a high priority for the faculty.
5. Facilitate appropriate student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission.
6. Serve *all* first-year students according to their varied needs.
7. Ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities.
8. Promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education, both for the individual and society.
9. Conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to achieve ongoing first-year improvement.

### **Outline Format for Self-study**

A self-study plan is included with this memorandum. It contains an outline of the self-study report showing the balance between providing evidence of fulfilling the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation and related Core Components and the special emphasis on the first year of college. The self-study plan shows the integration of the criteria tied into the nine dimensional committees that comprise the Foundations of Excellence structure.

### **Institutional Capacity and Commitment to Special Emphasis**

- 1. Provide the evidence that documents widespread ownership of and support for the special emphasis.**

During the fall in-service, Dr. Tom Armstrong, EWC President, told the employees that the Foundations of Excellence® in the First Year of College could form the basis for a special emphasis self-study for accreditation. It was further discussed at the steering committee level for the FoE which is comprised of nine dimension committee co-chairs, three co-liaisons, a FoE technician, and the survey administrator. The committee co-chairs then mentioned it to their members in regular dimension committee meetings. At this point, there are 98 faculty and staff

and 7 students, and one community member represented on these committees. Since there are only 130 total Eastern Wyoming College benefitted employees, this represents 75 percent of employee participation. It is expected that other students and staff members will volunteer for these committees. There is widespread support and encouragement for the combined project among faculty and staff. The self-study coordinator is also the Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and a long-time college employee of over 20 years.

**2. Describe the allocation of human and financial resources to support all of the components of the self-study processes, but devote focused attention on how those resources will support the special emphasis.**

Eastern Wyoming College has made significant financial commitments to this combined process. As mentioned previously, a group of eight employees traveled to the HLC annual meeting and attended numerous sessions on quality improvement, AQIP, Foundations of Excellence®, and special emphasis self-studies. Following this the College applied to and was accepted into the Foundations of Excellence® program—one of ten two-year colleges for this 2008-2009 year. The \$33,500 contract was budgeted and an additional \$13,000 was spent on travel and accommodations to attend the launch meeting. The strategic plan has an additional \$13,400 to fund the travel and registration for representatives from the self-study team to attend the HLC annual meeting in April, 2009.

Dr. Dee Ludwig, Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness, is the self-study coordinator and has as part of her primary responsibilities the accreditation processes for the institution. Extensive time and effort has been put forth by the 98 faculty and staff who are serving on the dimension committees which will also include the additional criteria work as outlined in the attached outline format for self-study. These committees represent every unit of the college. Two student members are included on the steering committee and several more are serving on dimension committees. It is anticipated that the student numbers will increase over the course of this self-study.

**3. Document the institution's commitment to submit reports on implementation and to share in on-going evaluation and research related to the special emphasis.**

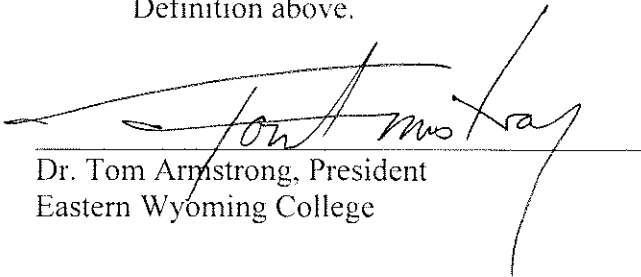
Eastern Wyoming College will send at least two people to attend a meeting put on by the Foundations of Excellence® staff to share results with others in the Foundation of Excellence® self-study process. Further, we have discussed with them the need to keep the evidence library being developed as part of the Foundations of Excellence process up-to-date and functional through the dates of our HLC team visit anticipated in January or February of 2011.

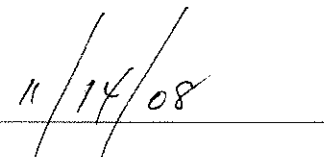
Eastern Wyoming College will support an implementation plan of new action projects which will result from the participation in the special emphasis self-study.

In addition, Eastern Wyoming College agrees to report annually on the progress in implementing the aforementioned action plans for two years following its on-site PEAQ visit. At the same time, the College intends to apply for admittance into AQIP following the completion of the HLC team visit in 2011.

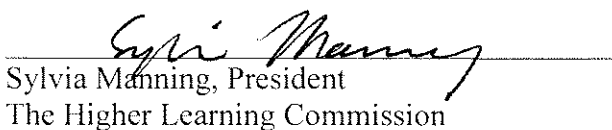
## Summary of Agreement


- The focus of the special emphasis self-study is improvement of the first year of college using the Foundations of Excellence® aspirational model. Eastern Wyoming College has a desire to improve the success of all its students and views the first-year as a critical period.
- The outline included in the attached Self-Study Plan shows how the Criteria of Accreditation will be addressed by the nine dimensional committees serving as the accreditation self-study committee.
- Eastern Wyoming College has made a significant commitment of financial and human resources to initiate the self-study of the first year. Resulting action plans will be embedded in the strategic planning processes of the College, and the College will support these plans as appropriate.
- The outline of the self-study demonstrates Eastern Wyoming College's intent to include results of the first-year study as a major part of its report to be sent to the Higher Learning Commission and the visiting team composed of Consultant Evaluators.
- Eastern Wyoming College is committed to participate in any meetings that HLC would recommend and to submit follow-up reports as appropriate to the Commission.
- Upon execution of this agreement, Commission staff will work with institutional representatives in organizing the special emphasis self-study, selecting team members, arranging the on-site visit, following the review process to completion, and monitoring institution/Commission follow-up.
- The Consultant-Evaluators Team will conduct the comprehensive evaluation visit to (a) determine the institution's fulfillment of the Criteria for Accreditation, and evaluate the special emphasis initiative under the agreed upon format, and (b) provide consultative advice regarding the implementation of plans for reaching the goals established in the Definition above.

  
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Dr. Tom Armstrong, President  
Eastern Wyoming College

  
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Date

Special Emphasis request accepted by the Higher Learning Commission.

  
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Sylvia Manning, President  
The Higher Learning Commission

  
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Date