

NCA Higher Learning Commission Accreditation Preparation Committee

Minutes

Thursday, December 4, 2003 (Eighth Meeting)

Present: Margaret Genisio, Tom Manning, Sam Adams, Nick Dvoracek, Dale Feinauer, Craig Fiedler, John Koker, Jean Kwaterski,, Quintin Sullivan.

Guests: Adele Newson-Horst, Associate Dean, COLS; Mike Watson and Joe Franklin, Office of Institutional Research

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

NCA Higher Learning Commission Site Visitor:

Margaret Genisio introduced Adele Newson-Horst who is on the advisory team for the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Newson-Horst explained that site visitors consult with and evaluate colleges. Each NCA team has a chairperson when it comes to campus and several consultant evaluators (CE), depending on the size and complexity of the institution. A resource room for documentation is available at the site as well as food and refreshments for the Higher Learning Commission NCA evaluation team.

The NCA Higher Learning Commission evaluation teams are in training for the transition from the old standards to the new. She recommended that we send one or two members of our committee to receive training as consultant evaluators next year (it is too late to apply for this coming year). She corroborated what the committee has understood and is acting on: It is important to review the three areas of institutional concern that were raised in the "1997 Report of a Visit": 1) assessment of student learning; 2) general education program; and 3) graduate program. Our institution has time to address these concerns and prepare to rectify their shortcomings.

Question-and-answer discussion:

- Question: How can we best "fold" the NCA Higher Learning Commission's four fundamental themes: 1) orientation to the future; 2) focus on learning; 3) connectedness (internally and externally); and 4) distinctiveness into the 5 criteria? According to Newson-Horst, our "Governing Ideas" and Mission statement (that includes 6 sets of core values and five strategic directions) fit nicely into the four overlying themes.
- Question: In 1997 NCA Accreditation a liaison person was available. Is this also an option for the 2007 Accreditation? The committee needs to request a consultant evaluator who is available anytime, said Newson-Horst. It would be of great value to have a Higher Learning Commission CE attend one of the meetings of the NCA Accreditation Preparation Committee meetings. She suggested that John Harris, who is in charge of this area, would be a good contact. Tactically, it would be a positive move to have a CE involved with the committee as soon as possible.
- Question: How much detail/data should the university have? Keep the NCA Team well informed by supplying lots of supporting data and documentation.
 - There is no standard check-off list used by the consultant evaluator teams.
 - Showcase the successes but do not ignore our areas of weakness; acknowledge them and make a case showing advancement in those areas of concern.
 - Include assessment of all units (academic and non-academic) such as advising, student affairs, Reeve Union, library, etc.
 - Our NCA Higher Learning Commission Web site is very important. The Higher Learning Commission will ask to review the site.
 - The site now has the 1997 Re-accreditation Report and "Report of a Visit" on-line (Nick Dvoracek)

- Video-conferencing or teleconferencing the NCA Higher Learning Commission Annual Meeting is a possibility instead of sending members to attend.
- Part of our accreditation narrative should include pertinent facts related to the budget crisis that may affect some of our institutional concerns: e.g. cannot hire permanent Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies; faculty hiring freeze may affect other "issues du jour" such as measuring student learning.
- According to Newson-Horst, the strongest criterion is Criterion 5: Engagement and service which have become big issues in this accreditation. Our University is uniquely positioned in advocating community service.
 - The American Democracy Project (Genisio) is related to Criterion 5.
 - Biology Department (Colleen McDermott) E.coli Beach Project - improvement of water quality testing at swimming beaches - demonstrates engagement and community service.

Discussion from Subcommittees:

- We need two years of pre- and post-testing data to show progress in assessing programs.
- General assessment should be going on with in-class assessment.
 - How faculty perceives "context of learning" - does any change occur? This may effect changes on departmental level.
- COEHS is using portfolios in documentation of student learning.
 - The portfolio process is evolving into electronic portfolios; instigate discussion with other units/departments who are using portfolios (Elliott Garb, Ted Balsler).
 - Portfolios can also be used as program review assessment.
- Genisio will contact the Higher Learning Commission to request a contact person to meet with this committee and discuss areas of concern.
- Meeting to be scheduled in February to share subcommittee ideas and experiences.
- Meeting to be scheduled during spring break (either Monday or Friday) to cross-reference master list of data sources.
 - possibly do an early draft of report outline
- Next fall have a committee member apply for training for NCA Higher Learning Commission CE.

Meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Marleen Flack, Recorder

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