

NCA Higher Learning Commission News May 2005

Reaccreditation



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN OSHKOSH

Are they really learning what we say they are?

Margaret Genisio, *co-chair*, Accreditation Committee

As we prepare for reaccreditation in 2007, assessment stands out as the major force driving the entire process. It was the topic of interest permeating the majority of session strands at this year's NCA-Higher Learning Commission Convention. With this issue of the newsletter we will provide the status of assessment on campus, especially with regard to academic units.

In 1995 in the American Association of Higher Education Bulletin, assessment was defined as systematically gathering, analyzing and interpreting evidence to determine how well student performance matches expectations. The definition expanded in 2005 (NCA/HLC) linking it to an organization's mission, and using information to inform thinking and affect change.

Assessment is as an ongoing activity without finality. The process is a series of audits and measures to understand

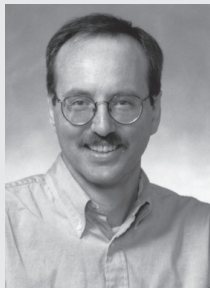
how goals are met. Reporting assessment involves describing the journey and the resulting change.

Assessment permeates the standards of many academic and non-academic professional organizations. We are pleased to report that assessment planning is part of the strategic planning activity in many campus units. In a recent meeting with **Randy Hedge**, Director of Reeve Memorial Union, Hedge described Professor **Alan Saganak's** (COEHS) assessment work with Reeve using the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS), to develop benchmarks for continuous improvement, an assessment plan.

We all engage in reflective thinking to affect change but it is the systematic collection of information and use of the information to affect change and improvement that is key to successful ongoing assessment. Assessment activity engages the entire campus community. The campus has achieved much in this area since the last visit of the NCA/HLC in 1997.

Tippins and Nuernberg named Self Study Co-coordinators

Michael Tippins of the College of Business Administration and Susan Nuernberg of the Department of English have been named Co-coordinators of the Self Study for the 2007 NCA Higher Learning Commission reaccreditation.



The responsibilities of the Co-coordinators of the Self Study are to develop operational plans for completing the self study report, working with the University-wide committee and the five criterion subcommittees in the data gathering and analyzing responsibility and, along with Reaccreditation co-chair Margaret Genisio, writing the report. They will also serve as university liaisons with the Higher Learning Commission and coordinate the site evaluation team visit.

Dr. Tippin's professional experience includes risk management consulting and systems design and development. His current research interest focuses on the interactions between marketing theory and health care issues, as well as organizational branding is-



sues and strategic planning. While at UW Oshkosh he has been actively involved in new course development (E-Business course, integration of enterprise resource management concepts in the classroom). Mike is a strong proponent of continuous process improvement and was co-coordinator for the recent marketing department program review. He is also the COBA representative to the university program review committee and a member of the undergraduate program review committee.

Dr. Nuernberg is an Associate Professor in the English Department. She presently serves on the Compensation Committee, Honors Program Council, Committee on Committees, NCA/HLC Accreditation Preparation Committee, and is an elected member of the Faculty Senate. As the Chancellor's Leadership Fellow, she has gained University-wide insight and experience that will be valuable to her as Co-coordinator of the University's upcoming assessment.

Where we are with assessment

John Koker, *chair*, Criterion 2 subcommittee

Jennifer Mihalick, *chair*, The Faculty Senate Committee on Assessment of Student Learning

The Higher Learning Commission's Criterion Three deals with student learning. To meet this criterion, the University must collect evidence of student learning. The Faculty Senate Committee on Assessment of Student Learning (FSCASL) has been busy working to help the University prepare for the reaccreditation process. Data on student learning collected by FSCASL will be included in the University's self-study document.

FSCASL met monthly during the 2004-05 academic year.

Todd Borgerding was chair during the fall semester and Jennifer Mihalick was chair during the spring semester. A website with reports and examples of assessment plans is being maintained by Jennifer Mihalick. (http://www.uwosh.edu/faculty_staff/mihalick/assessment.html)

Status of Program Assessments

A grid showing the status of each program appears on the facing page (and is also available on the web). The grid shows that departments are in many different stages with assessment and curriculum revision. Most departments have collected and evaluated assessment data; many have used those data to revise their curriculum; and a few have been able to collect enough data after a revision to judge the impact of the curriculum change on student learning.

Once an assessment plan is approved, departments are asked to report to the FSCASL once every two years. In 2004, nine programs submitted status reports which were reviewed by committee members. In addition, several programs consulted committee members on revisions to their

assessment plans. The rest of the programs should be submitting updates in summer 2005.

General Education Assessment

The plan for General Education Assessment was revised in 2003-2004. As a result of this, new information was requested from departments. In October 2004, each department teaching general education courses was asked to identify which of the University's ten broad goals are applicable to their subject, then define more specific learning objectives to be assessed in their courses. To date, 18 departments (2/3 of the total) have submitted these reports. To continue the process, every two years each department will be asked to report on the tools used to assess student learning and to summarize the results of the assessment.

The Committee members reviewed available standardized exams which could provide feedback on the overall design of the general education program. The *Academic Profile*, produced by Educational Testing Services, was determined to have the best match to the University's ten goals for general education. The Department of English agreed to assist the University by requiring an exam in a selection of their Advanced Composition courses. These courses must be taken by all students after they have earned 60 credits, so are often the last general education requirement to be completed.

The committee agreed with the English instructors that students should receive information about the value of these examinations. The FSCASL will provide a description of the purpose of assessment and its potential use in improving the curriculum. The committee will consult Career Services about how information on proficiency in reading, writing, critical thinking and math could be valuable in career planning and resume preparation.

Fundamental Questions for Conversations on Student Learning

Below is an excerpt from the new page on assessment from the NCA Higher Learning Commission. This page will be part of the NCA/HLC Criteria soon.

Five fundamental questions serve as prompts for conversations about student learning and the role of assessment in affirming and improving that learning:

1. How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, and degrees?
2. What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?
3. In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?

4. How do you ensure shared responsibility for assessment of student learning?
5. How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of your efforts to assess and improve student learning?

In using these questions, an organization should ground its conversations in its distinct mission, context, commitments; goals and intended outcomes for student learning. In addition to informing ongoing improvement in student learning, these conversations will assist organizations and peer reviewers in discerning evidence for the Criteria and Core Components.

The complete statement can be found at http://www.uwosh.edu/nca_accreditation/links.php

http://www.uwosh.edu/nca_accreditation

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Assessment and Accreditation

Lori Carrell, *Coordinator, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*

What is SoTL?

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Initiative at UW Oshkosh has been a faculty led, faculty development program arising from individual and institutional commitment to address pedagogical challenges with scholarly inquiry. The initial efforts on this campus, and campuses across academia, began in similar ways, with research questions spawned from the teaching experiences of individual faculty members. As the particular disciplinary lenses of those curious scholars informed their methodologies, a “movement” grew internationally about the nature of teaching, learning and scholarship in higher education.

An ever-expanding body of knowledge has been generated through related articles, books, conferences, academic journals, grants, Carnegie programs and professional organizations, solidifying “SoTL” as an international movement in higher education. The UW System has been an active participant in that movement, providing grants to individuals and institutions within the system, and participating as a system in a Carnegie cluster. Those UW System efforts resulted in our receipt of the highly prized Hesburgh “Certificate of Excellence” Award in 2005. These certificates of excellence are given annually to three universities nationwide for faculty development efforts that enhance undergraduate teaching and learning. While the SoTL movement extends far beyond our local campus, the beginning of that movement parallels the beginning of the SoTL Initiative at UW Oshkosh. A few faculty, passionate about teaching and learning and doing such work themselves, formed a steering committee, and obtained a grant from UW System. Since then a dozen SoTL projects have been formally proposed and funded as individual faculty members begin with a challenge in their classroom, develop research questions and a methodology appropriate for their discipline, conduct the research, enhance the teaching and learning of others by sharing the results with the campus community and submitting a manuscript for publication, and ultimately, apply the results to their own classrooms so that student learning benefits. This faculty development effort has included many other activities (<http://www.uwosh.edu/sotl/>) but at its heart is an individual instructor asking teaching and learning questions emanating from his or her own classroom.

How are SoTL and Assessment Related?

Since SoTL questions are typically generated from the experience of the researcher, the perception of SoTL work as being unrelated to “assessment” is typical.

Perceptions that “assessment” is a mandate from above, a

political reality foisted upon us, or a “necessary evil” not well related to “what we really do” exist in multiple educational contexts, including ours. However, at its best, assessment allows us to document student learning and further the excellence of the educational process. Though SoTL work tends to emanate from individual instructors and from inside the classroom, and assessment seems to have come from elsewhere, we need to consider how SoTL work can serve assessment efforts and assist us in reframing the process of assessment.

Consider the following example of a current UW Oshkosh research project funded by the SoTL Initiative. In the English department, **Charles Hill, Tara Pauliny and Marguerite Parks** just completed a study to determine *a)* the extent to which students taking Theme Based Inquiry Seminar courses develop effective writing skills (a general education goal on our campus) and *b)* to account for the writing process strategies that enhance student learning and performance in TBIS (an NCA/HLC goal). We should also note that “student writing” is one of the top five teaching challenges identified by UW Oshkosh faculty. Students in six sections of TBIS courses submitted first drafts of their first essays and final drafts of their last essay assignment to the researchers who used trained readers to score the essays using the “Six Traits of Writing” scoring rubric. The results have multiple uses including the enhancement of pedagogy and curriculum in TBIS courses leading to better student writing, publication of a manuscript that will include suggestions for modifications of the nationally-known six-traits scoring rubric for the undergraduate context, and, you guessed it, valid and reliable data to include in their assessment report. Not useless data. Not data unrelated to actual student learning. Not data generated for the purposes of a report—but data that deepens their understanding and informs their thinking about teaching and learning in their department. A similar study funded through the SoTL Initiative is underway in the Communication Department as **Robert Hinrichs** and **Jane Wypiszynski** investigate the impact on students’ critical thinking of two different approaches to teaching public speaking in the required speech course, COMM 111. Again, the results will inform those who make decisions about the direction of that program and will also provide information about how critical thinking is learned through public speaking instruction. And, oh yah...this SoTL inquiry will also serve the purposes of assessment because what we learn about learning by asking and answering these pedagogical questions is just the kind of thing the Higher Learning Commission hopes we’re doing—documenting student learning and working diligently and responsibly at the process of education.