University Assessment Council  
November 5, 2009, 10:00 a.m.  
AUSC 3163  
Minutes

Members Present: Drew Clark (Chair), Glenn Anderson, George Crandell, Susan Hubbard, Nels Madsen, Sharon McDonough, Sharon Oswald, Paul Patterson, Constance Relihan, Karen Rogers, Jennifer Schuessler, Tin Yau Tam, Susan Villaume, and Iryna Johnson.

Drew asked Paul Patterson and Constance Relihan to share assessment practices at College of Agriculture and College of Liberal Arts. On November 4, 2009, a forum of department heads and student advisors was held in the College of Agriculture. This forum was devoted entirely to the assessment issues. A college-level committee on assessment has been created in College of Liberal Arts. They meet once a month and involve primarily department chairs and people identified by department chairs.

The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss changes in how departments will report their assessment activities and results under our new “clear and simple” approach. Drew distributed a list of questions for the meeting:

- By when?
- To whom?
- After what process?
- In what form?
- In what level of detail?

The discussion started with the second question (to whom?). Should assessment reports go through college or directly to OIRA? Who should see these reports first? Most of the members agreed that the reports should go first to the college. Then, if at the college level, you see similarities, one can encourage departments to talk to each other in their efforts to improve.

After what process? This question is related to annual meetings to discuss student learning in a department’s degree programs. Should such meetings be held annually? Such meetings would have one agenda item: assessment of one program. Should these meetings be stipulated or recommended? Most of the members agreed that the meetings should be stipulated. Such meeting would “demystify the whole process” and make it [the process] more specific. A concern was expressed about programs that involve many faculty members. Some programs report to the Dean’s office, while others – to the department chair. A discussion on whether the meeting should be mandated or stipulated led to an agreement that such meetings should be university mandated (as opposed to college mandated).

By when? Members of the council suggested that the reports should be due to the Dean’s office on April 1, 2010 and to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment on May 15, 2010.

In what form? A concern about differences in form formats was expressed during the meeting. Having the same format is better whether we go with a database or text documents. And it provides a sense of direction to those filing the report. Additionally a shared format would be easier to implement in a database. For example, the database approach would be preferable even in the attempt to answer the first few compliance related questions: the number of programs we have and the proportion of those programs that completed the report.
In what form? The discussion started with Barbara Walvoord’s example from a Biology program. This example asks departments to provide a web address where students can see the learning goals for the degree program. While some members of the UAC supported requiring departments to post their learning goals on the Web, other members expressed concern about such a mandate and the time it would take to implement. Overall, such a website, while recommended, should not be mandated. Another point of discussion was whether or not to require departments to report their actual assessment findings as well as their assessment processes and uses of results. Most of the UAC members suggested that reporting the results is unnecessary. A concern was expressed that such an approach would not ensure that improvements are based on assessment. The sample Biology report shows no connection between improvements and measured used. Everything we ask programs to turn in should be related to improvements.

Then the form suggested by Nels Madsen was discussed. Everyone agreed that there are benefits in using such form. Most importantly, it emphasizes improvement. However, it would be more challenging to use such form for compliance purposes: listing all programs and demonstrating that 100% of these programs completed the report. Another possible implication of such form is that there will be one improvement at the college level that would be tied to all programs, and all programs will essentially have the same assessment report.

A suggestion was expressed that the learning goals could be pre-populated in the database, since those are not changed every year.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.