University Assessment Council  
October 18, 2012, 10:00 a.m.

Minutes

Members Present: Drew Clark (Chair), Skip Bartol, Cecilia Champion, Vince Cammarata, George Crandell, Kim Frazier (representing Amy Hecht Macchio), Susan Hubbard, Dan LaRocque, Libba McMillan (representing Jenny Schuessler), Sharon McDonough, Nels Madsen, Bruce Murray (representing Lenny Lock), Paul Patterson, Karen Rogers, Juliet Rumble, and Iryna Johnson.

Drew Clark called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M.

Drew Clark has sent each UAC member the text of Auburn University’s responses to the SACSCOC standards on institutional effectiveness (Core Requirement 2.5 and Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1). These responses are part of the institution’s compliance certification, submitted in September. Auburn has asserted that it is in compliance with these standards and provided evidence in support of that assertion. These documents will be reviewed by peer evaluators in November. Drew also mentioned Federal requirement 4.1 (Student achievement). A new interpretation of this standard requires institutions to establish criteria of acceptability for any measure of success they employ (such as a graduation rate). Because of this new interpretation, Auburn is likely to be found out of compliance with this requirement and will have to develop more formal measures of institutional success and criteria for those measures. It is anticipated that the University Assessment Council may need to be involved in that process.

Iryna Johnson distributed information about the assessment module offered by Digital Measures. Since 2006, Auburn has used a homegrown database—AU Assessment—to compile program-level assessment reports. However, this application is aging and has other limitations. For example, it truncates texts if the number of characters exceeds a certain limit, does not allow for attachments, and does not allow updating information from prior years in cases of ongoing practices. Thus a new assessment reporting system will probably have to be adopted. Drew mentioned that the advantages of Digital Measures are: (1) cost, since it is a free addition to Activity Insight; and (2) familiarity, since faculty members are already using the Digital Measures site. It also has a potential to link assessment to courses. One disadvantage of Digital Measures is that it is unpopular with some faculty members.

Nels Madsen asked if there would be an opportunity to see presentations of other products before selecting Digital Measures. The most frustrating part of a database-driven assessment system is that it may not capture the subtle and sophisticated process of assessment. As a result, the system provokes unwanted compliance behavior. Cecilia Champion mentioned that in the process of curriculum review at the College of Business, there are so many variables. However, there are no ways to bring this information into the assessment report. Drew suggested that in order to be able to document all nuances of assessment, one can use prose or go without a database.

Libba McMillan brought to attention the fact that we still need to demonstrate compliance; and it is easier to do so with the assessment database. Drew added that our peer institutions are using assessment databases; and it would be unusual for Auburn University not to ensure the comparability of assessment reports across programs. Kim Frazier mentioned that she likes that approach with Digital Measures, because it is a familiar system. Kim also mentioned use of Campus Labs by Student Affairs.
Drew asked UAC members whether they would like to see presentations of other vendors prior to making decision about adopting a certain system. Nels suggested that it would be better to hear from users of the different systems at other universities.

Skip Bartol mentioned that if we bring yet another software package to campus, we might get push back. We should be careful about pushing faculty to learn yet another software system. Dan LaRocque suggested that there might be an opportunity here as we can have one-stop site. Faculty members would not be asked to go to three different web sites to complete different reports. Skip added that this way the transition will be seamless. This way we will be more likely to get compliance. Karen Rogers added that the possibility to use attachments alone is a very positive feature of use of Digital Measures.

Iryna Johnson distributed information about two surveys conducted by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. The first survey—Survey of Recent Graduates—is administered on a yearly basis among graduates of Auburn University. This year we administer the survey of 2009-2010 graduates. There are both paper and web formats of this survey. Another survey—Survey of Graduating Seniors—is administered online every semester. UAC members were asked to consider a possibility of adding department- or program-level questions to these surveys.

Iryna Johnson provided an update on the progress of 2012 assessment report submission.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.