University Assessment Council  
October 26, 2011, 10:00 a.m.  

Minutes  

Members Present: Drew Clark (Chair), George Crandell, Susan Hubbard, Dan LaRocque, Leonard Lock, Edward Loewenstein, Nels Madsen, Sharon McDonough, Karen Rogers, Jennifer Schuessler, Tin Yau Tam, and Iryna Johnson.

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

Minutes from the last UAC meeting on September 13, 2011 were approved.

Drew Clark shared the example of compliance report for SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 Institutional Effectiveness from Morehead State University. Part of this report provides information about the number of units that provided assessment reports. The importance of assuring submission compliance from programs and units was emphasized.

Iryna Johnson provided an update on the progress of 2011 assessment report submission. The overall progress report provides the number of programs and units by college and the number of units and programs that submitted reports. Reports for colleges provide details on each program’s status.

Orientation to Auburn’s assessment system for new chairs was briefly discussed. Karen mentioned that an earlier OIRA session with department chairs in the College of Architecture, Design and Construction was helpful. Some UAC representatives provide orientation to the system for their department chairs. A question about topics of such sessions was raised. Sessions are not focused on the assessment software itself. That software is of limited life and will be eventually replaced with a commercial system. Sessions involve conversations about how faculty know how well their students are doing and how they make decisions about improvements to try.

UAC members discussed Marquette University’s practice of providing feedback to their faculty about assessment. Information about Marquette University’s practice was published in Assessment Update (2010), Volume 22, Number 5. The three-hour peer review at Marquette involves each participant working in an assigned peer-review group of three or four program assessment leaders per table. This is an available option for Auburn. Funds to pay faculty involved in peer-review groups will probably be available. UAC members agreed that a positive reinforcement would be helpful. A concern about involving faculty members from different disciplines was expressed. On the one hand, it is important to get faculty from different disciplines together. On the other hand faculty from other disciplines might be perceived as lacking relevant knowledge. Organizing peer-review groups around broad subject areas, such as social sciences or STEM disciplines, was suggested.

The importance of rubric development for such feedback sessions was mentioned. Having a rubric—a common foundation—might minimize a concern for involving faculty from different disciplines. When rubric from Marquette was reviewed, several concerns were raised. Some parts of the Marquette rubric are more administrative, such as “[a] majority of learning outcomes assessed annually.” Rubrics look great on paper, but frequently are difficult to implement. Facilitators of peer-review groups would help to make peer-review process more productive. Rubrics should also be used many times and then adjusted. Susan Hubbard shared how rubric is used as a vehicle to provide feedback to departments in College of Human Sciences.
UAC members discussed whether or not to recommend that feedback on assessment reports be organized centrally. There is no use of such support if one cannot stimulate participation or if rubrics are being treated as paperwork and not used for improvement. It was decided that UAC members will talk to their department chairs before such decision is made.

Leonard Lock provided an update on planning an assessment event in the College of Education. This event is planned for spring and will be aimed at initiating meaningful conversations about assessment.

Nels Madsen raised a question about connecting assessment with the program review process. The program review standards involve some attention to assessment. Recent assessment reports, if available, are included in the standardized data set for programs undergoing review. Some other universities link assessment to program review cycles. The more positive sides of program review are its comprehensive nature and its involvement of outside reviewers. Less positive sides are the infrequency of such reviews (only each 6 years) and the number of things that are looked at. As a result, assessment conversations are frequently muted.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 a.m.