

CIE UPDATE

The Center for Institutional Effectiveness

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BCC and Middle States – Past, Present, Future

Past – In November 2011 the Middle States Commission on Higher Education placed Bergen on warning because of insufficient evidence in our June 2011 Periodic Review Report that the institution was in compliance with Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment) and Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning). The College was directed to produce a Monitoring Report by September 1, 2012, providing evidence that Bergen had achieved and could sustain compliance with Standards 7 and 14. The Monitoring Report was to show evidence of a comprehensive, organized, and sustained process for the assessment of institutional effectiveness with evidence that assessment information is used in planning and allocating resources (Standard 7), and evidence of systematic and sustained assessment of student learning outcomes at the course and program levels, including general education (Standard 14). Bergen marshaled the entire college community to participate in the development of this Report and submitted it by the due date. The College remained accredited while on warning.

Present – There was a small team visit by Middle States on October 3 and 4 of this year. The two-member team interviewed various groups such as the President's Cabinet, assessment liaisons, and the CIE fellows. A comprehensive document room was prepared for the team, which included, among many other items, all assessment reports produced by both Academic and Administrative and Educational Support (AES) Units since 2005. At its exit report, given on October 4, the team stated that it found Bergen to be in compliance with Standards 7 and 14. A number of recommendations were made involving curriculum mapping; assessing general education outcomes; connecting the Strategic Plan, College dashboard, and budgeting; AES assessment; program review; and continued training of faculty and staff in assessment work. These recommendations are being addressed through the various CIE and administrative efforts.

Future – What lies ahead for Bergen? In January 2013, the Middle States Committee will meet to review both our Monitoring Report and the small team's findings. Its recommendation will be forwarded to the full Middle States Commission for consideration at its March 2013 meeting. The full commission makes the final decision regarding Bergen's status. The commission also will decide the date of Bergen's next full evaluation, that is, our next ten year visit. CIE will continue to work with faculty and staff to address any concerns that Middle States may have.

ASSESSMENT TIPS

Faculty may feel hesitant when beginning the assessment process. The following suggestions should ease some of your uncertainty.

Tip 1:

Make outcomes assessment collaborative in approach. It is essential that all faculty in the department be involved in the planning, process, tools development and revision, data measurement, action plan, and the outcomes assessment report. By taking this approach to outcomes assessment, all involved in the process take "ownership" and have a vested interest in student learning and the improvement of instruction.

Software Subcommittee

This past year, the Software Sub-committee, chaired by Jennifer Lyden, along with committee members Fitzgerald Georges, Maureen Ellis-Davis and Mecheline Farhat researched assessment software. The committee determined that the College needs software that will serve as a repository for assessment reports, and that will produce information for internal and external reports and projects. In addition, the software will need to foster the interdisciplinary sharing of information including general education outcomes. Presently, representatives of the software subcommittee are working with staff from Information Technology, Institutional Research, and Student Services to write a Request for Proposals (RFP) so interested companies can bid on this project. In early 2013, software proposals will be reviewed, and faculty will have the opportunity to participate in the decision making process.

Sharing Assessment

LAC members have been discussing means to share assessment projects and ideas. In addition to reporting back to faculty at department meetings, other possibilities include having assessment liaisons share their projects at department or school meetings, and hosting lunch time roundtable discussions about how assessment can benefit instructors. The LAC also is compiling a reference table of assessment projects from 2010 – 2012 that will be circulated to faculty.

Assessment of General Education

A General Education Assessment Committee is being formed to write an assessment plan (rooted in the existing plan of Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes) for the College's General Education Program. The plan will include centralized assessment of proficiencies that are more or less interdisciplinary, such as Information Literacy, Communication, Ethical Reasoning and Action, Technological Competency, and Global and Cultural Awareness.

The Learning Assessment Committee (LAC) Update

Beginning its second year as a Faculty Senate Committee, the members of the LAC have focused their discussions on a number of issues.

“Post-Middle States: The Culture of Assessment at Bergen Community College”

Assessment - We do it all the time. It is an embedded goal of higher education. As Descartes might say if he were teaching today, “I teach, therefore I assess.” Everyone who teaches also assesses. We use quizzes, tests, midterms, finals, portfolio reviews and licensure exams to evaluate students’ progress and assign a grade. We look for ways to improve our teaching and our students’ learning. In the process, we evaluate our teaching methods and revise our pedagogy. This iterative process is fundamental to how we accomplish our goals in teaching students. You could say we are experts in evaluating and assessing what students learn.

What has changed to take assessment from a classroom concern of faculty members to a more institutional focus? Why is there a demand to create an institutional “culture of assessment?”

The primary pressure comes from an increasing public insistence on accountability. This pressure comes from businesses who want to hire our graduates, from the federal government which provides funding through grant and loan programs for students, and from parents, who want to know that their children are learning and that their money is being well spent. The role of faculty is paramount. What are faculty members doing to help students learn? Are students learning what we want them to learn? Are we teaching them what they need to know? Are they graduating with the skills they need to enter the workforce and contribute in a significant way? Our accreditation agency expects a college to have a comprehensive process to assess student learning. The successful establishment of a “culture of assessment” has become a required goal of responsible institutions.

The culture we are asking faculty to create may seem alien to some parts of academe. Asking faculty members to agree on learning outcomes that are consistent across a particular course is not an easy task. But think about it, assessment does come from our culture. The cultural norms being asserted arise from faculty concerns about student learning which are now informal and individually determined. We work at our teaching methods and we do not want people to tell us what to do. We are not used to external assessments. In our own classrooms, we determine what to assess and we do not report the results. It is embarrassing to all of us when we see that students are not learning.

The information we get from the new culture of assessment is potentially useful and reinforcing. When we find the information to be helpful, we will be more likely to conduct additional assessments. In the end, it is the students who will benefit from this extra effort on the part of faculty.

ASSESSMENT TIP 2

Use your existing course materials, tests, portfolios, rubric forms, and projects to assess learning. Unless the tools need to be revised, they are great resources to use in the assessment of learning. Do not reinvent the wheel; use the tools that have already been created.

The Assessment Institute

In October, CIE Fellows Ilene Kleinman and Jane Phelps attended the Assessment Institute, presented each year by the Office of Planning and Institutional Improvement at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Attendees included a plethora of faculty, staff and administrators from around the world representing an array of public, private and proprietary institutions committed to a deeper understanding of student learning outcomes and institutional assessment.

Many presentations focused on accreditation, assessment methods, and capstone experiences. Some of the major themes included:

- What an institution values is what it measures – what an institution measures is what it values.
- To make assessment work, keep it simple. Assessment activities, on all levels, should be specific so they yield very specific data upon which one can act.
- Assessment should be inextricably tied to strategic planning. The Institutional Effectiveness Plan (IEP) captures all assessment activities.
- Assessment activities help guide the content for the strategic plan.
- The strategic plan lists broad goals we hope to achieve. The (IEP) states how we are going to get there. It answers how well our students are learning and how well our administrative services are functioning.
- What students are accomplishing, combined with how well the institution is functioning, (in all of its many facets) speaks to institutional effectiveness, aka institutional success. This is accountability.

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