University Assessment Committee Meeting Minutes
November 7, 2012
University Center Reception Room
10 to 11 am

Provost and Vice President Van Reidhead addressed the UAC regarding the Middle States Commission on Higher Education response to ESU’s Periodic Review Report.

Dr. Reidhead first thanked members for work of UAC. ESU has seen a direct impact of UAC work in the selection of the Proficiency Profile as an optional performance measure. ESU is placing an emphasis on student learning.

The organization of the UAC into Institutional Assessment, Program Assessment and Professional Development Workgroups is a perfectly good structure for achieving what we need to achieve at ESU regarding student learning assessment.

ESU needs to achieve several things as specified by Middle States and demonstrate that we are achieving them before our next accreditation report. Need to accomplish them at the same time as we are preparing for the report.

Transforming General Education at ESU:
Institutional level information indicates ESU cannot demonstrate our general education is improving our students critical thinking, writing, reading, quantitative skills, etc. MSCHE allows each institution to do whatever kind of general education curriculum they choose as long as the institution is documenting the attainment of general competencies. Using data we have, the General Education Committee and University-Wide Curriculum Committee need to work hand in hand with the departments to transform our general education program into an outcome based general education program. The outcome we are seeking is the demonstration of competencies in key learning areas.

Closing the Loop – Using Assessment Information to Improve Student Learning:
MSCHE is most concerned with ESU’s lack of evidence regarding use of our assessment of student learning outcomes information to make changes to improve student learning at the program level. This relates to general education as well as to every program. We must demonstrate we are actually using data we are getting at the program level to make changes in our curriculum and our pedagogy to achieve the student learning outcomes we said we are going to achieve.

ESU needs to annually evaluate the student learning outcomes we have identified. Our student learning outcomes will evolve over time. We must annually demonstrate the methodologies we have in place for assessing the degree for which are students are achieving these outcomes, demonstrate collecting and analyzing data, then demonstrate we are taking the information into the structure in place at the program level (committee/department as a whole) and discussing what data are telling us and how we can do things better, and finally demonstrate on an annual basis the actions we taking to address needed changes.
Open Discussion

President Welsh is discussing shrinking General Education from a wide GE to a core GE curriculum. Impression from Dr. Reidhead’s comments is an expansion of GE.

Dr. Reidhead explained he believes we need to reduce the vast number of courses across Arts and Sciences currently considered GE to move to a smaller number of courses to meet our identified general education competencies. ESU can draw down the number of courses overall but possibly open up to courses outside Arts and Sciences.

How can we make changes on an annual basis when processes at ESU do not facilitate making changes that rapidly?

Dr. Reidhead indicated faculty should also be considering changes a department has the power to change quickly - that would be your pedagogy, for example, reduce lecture and increase the number of case analyses done. Discussion regarding other changes which do not require curricular review – where faculty and department are change agents.

General discussion regarding GE changes ensued within UAC membership. If GE is organized around competencies and not courses the structure would not need to change very much each year. We have been so long without change this sounds scary. For example, competency based approach will allow us to develop strategies to spread the load for improving writing. Is there a preferred GE model? MSCHE does not care which approach taken – x number of courses versus competencies

We need to be aware of the message we are sharing about assessment. In the past, the committee has tried to say assessment for assessment sake - trying to get message out. Dr. Reidhead observed that we must be balanced in the message. It is true that our accreditation is on the line and that does translate into our credibility as an institution of academic excellence. Our accreditation affects our financial picture.

There has to be a bigger message to the ESU community – this is about our survival and our reputation. If ESU is going to exist as a positive institution - accreditation is important. We should be communicating to our students what we want them to learn in terminology they understand.

Dr. White agreed the message and terminology is very important and must be conveyed to students as well as faculty. One of the reasons these efforts have been stalled is the perception of an increased workload for faculty.

Role of Assessment Committee Moving Forward

Actions need to take place quickly. Predicated by what we can do well but not perfectly.

1. Institutional Level Group - generate a report to share with GE Committee, UW Curriculum Committee, department chairs and President outlining results and implications to achieving student learning outcomes.

2. Tackle program level assessment of student learning outcomes and closing the loop demonstrating annual use of data to improve practices. Professional Development and Program Level Workgroups to work with UAC co-chairs to look into TracDat. Tracdat is a software system focused specifically on
achieving goals and documenting actions taken in achieving those goals. PASSHE has purchased this software and it is available to us. Groups should make recommendation to provost if we are going to adopt this software to assess program level and institution level tracking of student learning outcomes. Train departments and put timeline in place and start doing. This can serve as a system of record - permanent record of actions. Great system for demonstrating to MSCHE we are doing what we say we are doing.

3. Dr. Reidhead will have to locate resources to support these efforts.