WHERE WE ARE; WHERE WE ARE GOING

Lehman College underwent its decennial review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education last spring. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of the College community, the College’s accreditation status was reaffirmed last June. Middle States, however, has also requested the following:

…a follow-up monitoring report due by April 1, 2011 documenting evidence of the development and implementation of an organized and sustained assessment process to evaluate and improve student learning and institutional effectiveness, including evidence that (1) assessment results are used to improve planning, teaching, and learning (Standards 7 and 14), and (2) establishment of measurable goals at the program and course levels (Standard 14).

Requests for monitoring reports are not rare, but they do require us to make progress in meeting Middle States’ standards. A monitoring action indicates that the Commission has identified one or more standards with which an institution may not be in compliance, if the institution fails to give due attention and continue to make progress. A substantive, detailed report indicating how the institution is meeting the standards is required in response to the action.

For the past year, the College has taken several steps to develop and implement an organized and sustained assessment process. Last academic year, the Lehman College Assessment Council was formed to help facilitate the process of assessing student learning across the institution. In August, Raymond Galinski was hired as the College’s full-time assessment coordinator. He is working with faculty to develop assessment plans and to integrate assessment into the College’s planning process. Additionally, two new associate dean positions in the Divisions of Arts and Humanities and Natural and Social Sciences were established to help coordinate these efforts at the division level.

This past fall, assessment ambassadors in the Division of Arts and Humanities and Natural and Social Sciences were hard at work developing learning goals and objectives for all undergraduate programs. These form the foundation of the assessment process and reflect the knowledge, skills, abilities, and habits of mind that graduating students are expected to possess at the conclusion of their programs of study. Ninety percent of programs have completed this first step.

This spring, the second and third steps of the assessment process are occurring—mapping learning opportunities and assessing objectives. The data collected at the conclusion of this semester will be tabulated and reported back to departments and divisions by the end of May. Next fall, faculty will discuss findings and report what they have learned from the results and explain how the information is being used to improve planning, teaching, and learning. This process of assessing objectives, analyzing data, and using results for improvement is one that will be repeated continuously as we work to build a culture of ongoing evaluation, reflection, and improvement at Lehman.

In the late 1990s, assessment efforts were furthered as several regional accreditors began to strengthen their assessment language. In response, colleges in several regions began to create assessment plans, and several new assessment tools were developed to meet these new expectations. In 2002, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education joined in with the publication of Fourteen Characteristics of Excellence, which further emphasized the importance of Institutional Assessment (Standard 7) and Assessment of Student Learning (Standard 14). Now eight years later, Middle States continues to take an increasingly rigorous stance in ensuring that these two standards are being met by institutions in the region.

In the past year, learning outcomes assessment has been a topic of numerous conversations and meetings across campus. But many of you may still be wondering what assessment is all about and why we, as a college community, need to be actively engaged in it. Assessment Central was created to help demystify the process, explain the steps being taken to help improve teaching and learning, and demonstrate to internal and external audiences the effectiveness of current teaching and learning methods.

Assessment Central will also update the College community on assessment activities and events, educate you on important assessment topics, and showcase assessment projects undertaken across the College. We hope that you enjoy this inaugural edition.

ASSESSMENT: A BRIEF HISTORY

Formal assessment of student learning may be new to Lehman College, but it is a process that has been underway in higher education for over two decades. Since the mid-1980s, with the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, outcomes assessment language has been included in the nation’s regional accreditors’ standards. Coinciding with the learner-centered movement and gaining momentum with Barr and Tagg’s seminal 1996 article, A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education, student learning outcomes assessment began to take on increased prominence at postsecondary institutions all across the nation throughout the 1990s.

In the late 1990s, assessment efforts were furthered as several regional accreditors began to strengthen their assessment language. In response, colleges in several regions began to create assessment plans, and several new assessment tools were developed to meet these new expectations. In 2002, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education joined in with the publication of Fourteen Characteristics of Excellence, which further emphasized the importance of Institutional Assessment (Standard 7) and Assessment of Student Learning (Standard 14). Now eight years later, Middle States continues to take an increasingly rigorous stance in ensuring that these two standards are being met by institutions in the region.

While often reviled by critics for creating unnecessary mandates for institutions, Middle States and the regionals are actually peer