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Middle States Accreditation Review Process is Underway

An important exercise for an institution to undertake is the assessment of its overall effectiveness. WPUNJ is currently engaged in such an exercise as part of the accreditation review process.

Accreditation signifies that an institution has reviewed itself, was examined by educators of similar organizations, and was found to be meeting its own goals as well as standards set by the larger educational community. The regional accreditation agency for WPUNJ is the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (commonly referred to as "Middle States"). Middle States is expected to reaccredit WPUNJ at the end of the review process. Institutional accreditation is a prerequisite for many specialized accreditations of individual programs and for institutional participation in many federal programs.

The University was first accredited by Middle States in 1958. Once an institution has been accredited, it is periodically reviewed to ensure it continues to meet accreditation standards. Major reviews are conducted every ten years. The University's last major review was in 1990-91. Accreditation was reaffirmed in June 1991.

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The first step in the current review process is the writing of a University self-study report. The review process will culminate in the spring of 2001 with a visit to our campus by a team of reviewers from peer institutions.

Using Accreditation for Assessment

The process of accreditation review with Middle States offers a unique opportunity to engage faculty in the assessment of student learning. Assessment Committee member Pixy Ferris learned in a workshop conducted by Syracuse University at the AAHE Conference on Faculty Roles and Rewards (1998).

Accreditation involves three major activities: self-study, peer review, and commission judgement. These three activities are not just conducted in the expectation of public accountability, but of improving academic quality.

Evidence of student learning and development is both central to the culture of assessment, and an integral component of academic quality. Therefore the programs of internal evaluation entailed in the processes of self-study provide invaluable data for faculty.

The evidence gathered through the assessment process is not only useful to faculty for judgement and adjustments in academic programs, but is also useful for reflection and pedagogical improvement.

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The University self-study report will be a compilation of reports reflecting on how effectively the University's programs,

activities, services and resources contribute to the overall mission.

The report is being organized around four major themes of the Mission Statement:

(1) Student Success; (2) Academic Excellence; (3) Diversity; and (4) Community Outreach. It is also

organized around Assessment, an area receiving increased attention in the accreditation process. The Association's policy statement on Outcomes Assessment includes the following expectation:

"... institutions should develop guidelines and procedures for assessing overall institutional effectiveness, with primary attention given to assessment of student learning outcomes, which are fundamental to the accreditation process."

Dona Fountoukidis, Director of Planning, Research and Evaluation, and Stephen Hahn, Associate Provost, are co-chairing the 17-member Steering Committee that oversees the self-study process. Ten task groups of faculty and staff prepared draft reports in January 2000 which are now being reviewed, by the Steering Committee. Marc Schaeffer, Executive Assistant to the President, is chair of the Steering Committee's editing group that will assemble and edit the task group reports to yield the full self-study report. Lekha Keister, Middle States Coordinator, has been facilitating the overall process.

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The themes around which WPUNJ's accreditation process is organized

Lekha is currently setting up a Middle States web site to share information about the self-study process, gain input to the self-study from the campus community, inform the campus community about the self-study findings, and provide a forum to discuss the findings.

(Student Success, Academic Excellence, and Assessment, among others) should prove particularly useful to faculty interested in improving quality.

Task group reports will be completed by March, and drafts of the full self-study will be completed by May 2000. Faculty interested in data from the accreditation process for student and program assessment can contact Lekha Keister at OPRE (x3623) for further information.

Outcomes Assessment Symposium 2000

Place: East Stroudsburg University

Date: April 7, 1999.

Time: 9-2:30

The symposium features three strands: innovative classroom assessment practices, program evaluation and the role of outcomes assessment in general education. If you are interested in attending, please contact Sharon Hanks (x3457)

Credo

Assessment Matters has a simple but elegant credo. Every bit of the content, always, will be devoted to WPUNJ's attempts to answer three fundamental questions: 1) What should students know? 2) How well are they learning? 3) How do we know that? If we, as a learning community, cannot answer these questions, nothing else matters. Am

The target month for completing the first draft of the self-study report is May 2000; the process involves review and revision of the task group reports (February-March) and assembling them into a full report (April-May).

Based on feedback from the task groups, a second draft of the full report will be prepared (July-August). This second draft will be distributed to the campus community in the fall of 2000 for discussion and campus

feedback. After final editing (December-January), the report will be mailed to the visiting team in February 2001.

The campus visit by the Middle States team will be in April 2001.

Assessment Awards And Assessment Development Awards

Applications are currently being accepted for the Tenth Round of Assessment Awards and Assessment Development Awards. Endowed by restricted, designated funds, grants of \$500 or partial overload credit will be made to successful applicants who wish either to learn more about assessment in their particular discipline or area, institute an assessment project, or further develop one already in progress.

Interested faculty or staff can obtain application forms with all the details from the Assessment Office, Hunziker 200. **Deadline for submission is April 14, 2000.** No applications will be considered after that date.

Classroom Assessment Techniques

Classroom assessment is both a teaching approach and a set of techniques. The approach is that the more you know about what and how students are learning, the better you can plan learning activities to structure your teaching. The techniques are mostly simple, non-graded, anonymous, in-class activities that give respond to the question and then places the response in the envelope. When finished, go through the student responses and determine the best criteria for the patterns of responses with students that can lead to better teaching and learning.

Memory matrix

Create a two-dimensional diagram with cells representing two related concepts. For example, cells might consist of periods (Baroque, Classical), by

both you and your students useful feedback on the teaching-learning process.

Classroom assessment differs from tests and other forms of student assessment in that it is aimed at course improvement, rather than at assigning grades. The primary goal is to better understand your students' learning and so to improve your teaching.

While many useful CATs exist, a good starting point in their use is Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross' book [1993. *Classroom Assessment Techniques. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass*], which presents fifty CATs. When selecting a CAT, choose techniques that you are comfortable with, and that meet the goals of your course. Some examples of easy to use CATs follow.

Chain Notes

Begin by writing one question about the class, or one item in a list. (For example, in a Chemistry class, one could write the first element in the periodic table and ask each student to provide an additional element.) Place your question in an envelope. Students then pass around the envelope. When the envelope reaches a student he/she spends a moment to

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countries (Germany, France, Britain), or of concepts (theories and examples of each). Ask students to enter information into the cells to demonstrate their ability to remember and classify key concepts.

Tally the responses (right and wrong answers) in each cell. Analyze differences both between and among the cells. Look for patterns among the incorrect responses.

Directed paraphrasing

Ask students to write a layman's "translation" of something they have just learned -- geared to a specified individual or audience -- to assess their ability to comprehend and transfer concepts. For example, in a research methods course, students could be asked to explain a particular research method (Experimental, Ethnographic) to the layman.

When finished, categorize student responses according to important characteristics, then analyze the responses both within and across categories, noting ways you could address student needs.

Student Input into the Middle States Accreditation Process

Students are being encouraged to participate in WPUNJ's accreditation self-study process. The University's *Design for the Self-Study Process*, that was approved by Middle States, emphasizes the intent to obtain input not only from faculty and staff but also from students.

particularly positive about the library; the Student Technology Consultants; the value of courses that improved their communication skills, particularly writing; the Freshman Seminar; and adjunct faculty who are practitioners in their fields.

Some of the student concerns were about registration, advisement, difficulty in obtaining accurate information, problems associated with courses needed to graduate, crowded classrooms, transfer-credit problems, and inadequate assistance in language labs. Detailed notes on the two meetings

The task groups conducting the self-study are seeking student input via questionnaires and focus group meetings, and by reviewing student satisfaction surveys done by OPRE. Student perspectives on student learning, teaching effectiveness, quality of program offerings, campus climate (diversity issues), and student support services (both academic and administrative) are being gathered to assess the overall effectiveness of WPUNJ.

Two recent student focus group meetings (on November 30 and December 1) were particularly informative. The 27 students who participated in the meetings were randomly selected. They included full-time and part-time students, freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors, residents and commuters, traditional and non-traditional students, and students of various race and ethnicities, including foreign students. They also represented a wide variety of majors.

Two moderators, assistant deans Christina Murphy and Maureen Gillette, posed the questions from the self-study task groups. The students engaged in lively debate and offered many recommendations. Students were

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can be obtained from Lekha Keister at OPRE. The notes are also filed in the Middle States file cabinet in the library along with the taped recordings of the meetings.

Assessment Matters is published by the Assessment Committee of the WPUNJ Faculty Senate. Co-editors: Pixie (Sharmila) Ferris and Lekha Keister. We welcome commentary, news articles, and letters to the editor. Please address them to Pixie Ferris at Hobart 204 or to Lekha Keister at OPRE, College Hall.
