Institutional Assessment Council

December 5, 2014 Minutes

Present: Janelle Voegele, Vicki Wise, Suzanne Matthews, Robert Halstead, Leslee Peterson, Rowanna Carpenter, Neil Ramiller, Tom Bielavitz

(A) Suzanne Matthews presented an interim report to the IAC summarizing the work to date in updating information about program assessment activity across the colleges. Using a revised version of the template and criteria (template D) used to map and report on assessment activity in 2010, an updated record of program assessment is 50% complete. So far, there is evidence that some programs have progressed in their assessment work from an “emerging” to “midstage” development as categorized using template criteria. The next step will be to devise a plan to reach out to programs to build relationships, to confirm template information, to gather examples of exemplary assessment practices, and to offer resources to those programs requesting additional support. Robert Halstead reminded the Council that the original Template D resulted from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities’ observation that Portland State’s institutional documentation process was not complete. Template D was therefore created to establish a baseline from which to compare subsequent assessment activity. Robert also observed that due to the recent adoption of Program Review and other initiatives, updated program information should become more readily available in the future. The Council discussed the current status of graduate level assessment documentation. A decision was made to complete the undergraduate mapping first, and then to invite ex-officio member Margaret Everett to join the Council for a discussion on the status of graduate level assessment.

(B) The second agenda item focused on regular program reporting cycles for assessment that would assist departments in preparing for program review, give departments’ timely information, and create opportunities for sharing assessment work across programs. Janelle Voegele reviewed the presentation given at the November IAC meeting in which she summarized the results of interviews with over forty faculty and administrators regarding institutional assessment practices. The results of these interviews were further compared to themes from campus interviews conducted at PSU by Dr. Bill Rickards. One primary finding was the recommendation that institutional assessment be driven by academic departments and their needs, with an institutional process established for those with assessment expertise to analyze selected departmental findings connected to campus wide learning outcomes, and provide feedback to colleges and departments on institutional findings connected to those outcomes. The Council was generally in favor of this approach, provided a suitable and sustainable process could be developed for “connecting the dots” across programs and providing timely feedback to programs on their work. The Council then reviewed an example of a reporting template from New Mexico State University’s Office of Assessment. This discussion prompted a variety of questions and suggestions, including:
1) The importance of a detailed communication plan related to any proposed assessment cycle

2) The importance of reassuring chairs and others responsible for program assessment that they don’t have to start from scratch: much work is already going on

3) The importance of connecting with ongoing initiatives at the program and campus level: How is this beneficial? How does this help tell the story of programs and departments, help to attract students and potentially increase enrollment, etc?

4) The importance of strategic outreach

5) Communicating the value of the work: Make explicit the connection to program review cycles, the benefit of having data available for accreditation and any other inquiries for information, documenting and communicating that we “are sharper”

6) Question: Who collects this information and where? Where does the “buck stop” in terms of program reporting?

The Council will review a draft proposal in January that contains the proposed rationales discussed above. The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 pm.