

Self-Study Institute

November 7-8, 2001
Double Tree Hotel
Philadelphia, PA

Organized by the Middle States Commission on
Higher Education

Those present at this Institute fall into the following three groups:

1. Presenters and Co-Facilitators (13)
2. Middle States Staff (7)
3. Institutional Representatives (around 100)

From AUB, Attended by:

Peter Heath, Provost
Waddah Nasr, Associate Provost

Wednesday Nov. 7, 2001

Welcome and Program overview

Jean Avnet Morse, Executive Director, Commission on Higher Education (CHE).

George Santiago, Jr., Executive Associate Director, CHE.

This was followed by two plenary sessions.

Plenary session 1. “Characteristics of Excellence: What is new? What is different?”

Peter F. Burnham, President Brookdale Community College and Chair, Steering Committee for the Review of Characteristics of Excellence.

Burnham explained how the new document came about and what distinguishes the new characteristics of excellence from the old [The “new” document is the August 2001 draft of the Characteristics of Excellence on the basis of which we have prepared our Self Study Design.] He noted that the new document is intended to be a more usable, more utilitarian document. **The central principle remains, however, that the self-study process should be viewed by the institution as an opportunity to validate its mission.** Burnham made specific reference to standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning). He cautioned institutions not to be overwhelmed with the increased emphasis on institutional assessment and the assessment of student learning. “Begin with what you already have,” he advised, “then consider additions.” Burnham also referred to Standard 12 (General Education). Those involved in general education, he noted, are not in agreement as to what exactly constitutes a general education and how best to implement this concept through an institution’s academic programs. The general education standard has been expanded to require not only evidence of creativity and critical thinking but also technological competency and information literacy. Burnham pointed out that institutions that offer “specialized” programs (professional schools) are also expected to meet the general education requirement.

Burnham assured those institutions working on the basis of the August, 2001 draft of characteristics of Excellence that they would not be disadvantaged by “few changes that will be introduced to the final draft.” The “final draft” is expected to be approved in January 2002.

Plenary session 2: “ Early Planning, the Campus Environment, and the Self-Study Design”

Helen K. Lafferty, University Vice President and Assistant Professor, Education and human Services, Villanova University, and Robert Clark, Professor, Allied Health Science, Cumberland County College.

I. Lafferty:

Lafferty represents Villanova University. Those of us who served on the Self-Study Design Committee are familiar with the “Villanova Model”. Lafferty advised that the self-study remain “mission driven and learning focused”. Villanova chose the comprehensive model because this model “enables a college or university to appraise **every aspect** of its programs and services.” One of their major goals was “to provide an inclusive approach encouraging wide participation of the university community.” They went on line and provided an “open forum to review documents.” The role of Villanova’s Office of Planning, Training and Institutional Research (OPTIR) was central to the self- study.

II. Clark:

Cumberland County College (CCC) is a small community college in New Jersey. Their self-study was timed at a “crucial moment.” The institution has undergone reorganization including change of leadership. The self-study came at a “crucial moment” when the college community acknowledged the “need for careful introspection”. At the basis of the self-study was a “renewed commitment to excellence.”

Clark is convinced that appreciation of the value of careful introspection is an essential ingredient for a successful self-study. He also advised to “keep the community informed and involved.” Clark acknowledged that large committees “can be very difficult to manage.” But this disadvantage, he believed, is outweighed by the fact that a larger committee makes possible the inclusion of a “greater range of expertise”, allows for “spreading the work load”, and may lead to “greater community ownership and trust.” Clark also advised the inclusion in each sub-committee (task team) “some people who are not involved in the area”. Moreover, each committee should have a liaison member (who is not the Chair). At Cumberland Community College, the liaison committee wrote the self-study report.

During the question and answer session that followed the two presentations, each of the two speakers identified a major challenge that their respective institution faced during the self-study. Lafferty: “Keeping the momentum; keeping all involved and interested throughout a long process.” Clark: “maintaining credibility; members needed assurance about the integrity and truthfulness of the process. Everything in the open; no sweeping under the rug.”

Breakout #1: Early Planning.

This session was introduced and ‘moderated’ by Elizabeth Sibolski, Executive Associate Director, CHE. The two main ‘resource persons’ came from Wesley

Theological Seminary, an institution that has gone through and completed the process of self-study and recently attained accreditation. Bruce Birch is Academic Dean at Wesley; Lucy Hogan, who was the Editor the self-study document, is professor of Preaching and Worship at Wesley.

The following are points of interest that came out of the Wesley experience.

- Wesley sought accreditation from one of the major ‘specialized’ agencies that accredits theological seminaries, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), at about the same time that they sought Middle States accreditation. What Wesley prepared in order to meet the requirements of one agency was, most of the time, very useful in preparing to meet the requirements of the other accrediting agency. “Accrediting agencies seem to be moving in the same direction,” Hogan concluded.
- “What you plan in the Design may not unfold into the self-study exactly as planned it—you never know what may come up.”
- Regarding the self-study report: “keep in mind the final document from the beginning. Keep in mind that this document will be read by a **total stranger**; the document should make sense to that person.”
- “Address differences and disagreements; do not brush them off. You need consensus.”
- “The Evaluation Team takes into consideration where you are in your history, not just mission and recognized standards and procedures.”
- “You don’t have to solve all your problems before you write the report (or even before you get accreditation). Make sure you identify your problems and explain how you intend to resolve them.”

Breakout # 2: Self-Study Design and Institutional Involvement

Same facilitator and presenters as in # 1

Regarding the Self-Study Design:

- The charges for the sub-committees (task teams) are the most important part of the Design. “Make sure that the charges are clear and well thought out”.
- “Give the campus community a chance to provide input” was a recurring piece of advice; as well as: “Ask various ‘units’ what questions they would like to ask.”
- “Try not to have too many surveys, studies, activities that are **just** for the self-study. Whatever you do, or initiate, should be something that could be continued and is of value to the institution.” The self-study represents a vast investment of time, energy and resources; it should have continuous, long-term value and relevance.

Regarding the Self-Study Report:

- You want the Self-Study Report to be a continuous narrative. A system of cross-referencing makes the document more readable. You should decide

what should be incorporated in the main body of the report and what should be in the form of appendices.

- You may wish to put the completed report on the Web [except, perhaps, for some supporting documents that cannot be put on the Web]. This will cut down on the number of copies that you may, otherwise, have to make.

‘Scheduled Appointment’ with Dr. George Santiago, Jr., Our CHE Staff Liaison
(2:30 p.m., November 7, 2001))

Dr. Santiago had earlier received a copy of the Self-Study Design document prepared by the Self-Study Design Committee. He gave us a copy of this document with his he had written a number of remarks and suggestions. He felt that we had developed a Self-Study design that on the whole was very good. He felt that the questions, in particular, were “pretty good.” He had reservations about the timetable we suggested (pp 28-29 of the Self-Study Design). He indicated that we need to address the eligibility requirements that initial accreditation must meet (listed on pp xi–xiii of the Aug. 2001 draft of Characteristics of Excellence). He asked us to try to identify an institution of similar size to AUB and with comparable programs. Dr Heath suggested the University of Rochester. Dr. Santiago reminded us that we should send to Dr. Judson Taylor, our consultant, a progress report addressing the issues raised by the Candidacy Assessment Team in the report that the team made at the conclusion of its visit to AUB last March. This progress report should be sent by December 1, 2001. [This report was finished before December 1, 2001 and copies were sent via e-mail to Dr. Taylor and to Dr. Santiago; copies, signed by Dr. Waterbury, were post mailed to them as well.]

Thursday, November 8, 2001

Plenary Session: Outcomes Assessment:

“Assuring Student Learning and Demonstrating Institutional Effectiveness”

Linda Suskie, Coordinator of Assessment, Towson University, CHE Fellow, and Former Director, AAHE Assessment Forum.

Suskie began by asking each person in the audience to complete the sentence “Students who pass my course know how to ...” by producing a list of six distinct items. Five minutes later she asked: “Would your colleagues have come up with the same list? Do you have a common understanding of what a passing student can do? An ‘A’ student? Would your students have come up with the same list?” Moving on from the course level to the program level, the list would now be in answer to the question: “When our students graduate or complete our program, they will know how to ...”

Questions and issues that Suskie addressed in the rest of her presentation included: What is ‘good’ assessment? Placing the emphasis on higher order thinking skills (on lasting learning); setting clear goals and clear strategies to achieve those goals; putting the results to good use (to improve and not just to grade or evaluate). Will assessment ever go away? Is assessment only in response to external regulations and external accountability mandates?

Suskie concluded by stressing the need to recognize the “scholarship of teaching and learning” as a legitimate area of scholarship.

Breakout # 3: Implementation Topics
Outcomes Assessment and Self-Study
Santiago and Suskie

Suskie used the same approach to discussing assessment issue that she used in the plenary session. Examples on exercise-questions that she asked the group to address:

Write down three important skills that all students from your institution should learn. How do you **really** know that your students are graduating with these skills? Are you using that information to do a better job educating your students?

It is essential that goals be clearly identified. Having identified our goals, how do we get evidence that students are learning? “Work on your assessment plan”, Suskie recommended, “and put the results to good use.”

In developing strategies to improve student learning, we should keep in mind (as Suskie advised in one of her handouts) that “there is increasing evidence that students learn best when:

- They understand course and program goals and the characteristics of excellent work.
- They are encouraged to focus on developing higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving, as well as discipline-based knowledge.
- They spend more time actively involved in learning and less time listening to lectures.
- They engage in multidimensional “real world” tasks.
- Their learning styles are accommodated.
- They work collaboratively with others, with all learners — students and professors — respecting and valuing others as learners.
- Assignments and assessments are intertwined with learning activities and focus on the most important course and program goals.
- They have opportunities to revise their work.
- They reflect on what and how they have learned.”

On another handout Suskie listed more than 50 “examples of evidence of academic quality”. These examples were listed under three headings.

1. Evidence of Student Learning; such as:
 - Ratings by cooperative education/internship supervisors
 - Employer ratings of satisfaction with the program and employee skills
 - Pass rates on appropriate licensure/certification exams
 - Student reflections on what they have learned over the course of the program
 - Excerpts of student work, before-and-after samples of student work, or portfolios of student work (e.g., teaching portfolios for students in teacher education programs)

2. Indirect Evidence of Student Learning; such as:
 - Graduate School admission rate
 - Graduate and professional programs into which students are accepted
 - Placement into career positions
 - Average proportion of final grade based on assessments of higher-order thinking skills
 - Percent of freshman-level classes taught by full professors
 - Student and/or alumni ratings of satisfaction with the program

3. Evidence of Other Aspects of Academic Quality, such as:
 - Specialized accreditation
 - Graduation rate
 - Length of time to degree
 - Student/alumni satisfaction, collected through surveys, exit interviews, or focus groups
 - Expenditures for faculty professional development
 - Number and/or dollar value of grants awarded to faculty whose purpose is improved student learning

Plenary Session 2: ‘Writing the Report’

Clark and Lafferty

Clark and Lafferty were key persons in the whole self-study process and supervised the preparation, and writing, of the Self-Study Report at their respective institution.

Lafferty:

- Produce a databased text; no room for conjecture.
- The steering committee should understand from the beginning that the final report is their responsibility.
- All questions should be reviewed by the Steering Committee to eliminate redundancy and insure consistency.

- Format: Common chapter outline; chapter narrative; summary and recommendations. In addition to the preface, there should be (a somewhat longer) executive summary.
- You are likely to have multiple writers at the initial stages, perhaps many reviewers; but ultimately one “synthesizer”.

Clark:

- It is essential to establish effective communication with the college community; this will enhance the community’s sense of ownership and trust.
- Establish a self-study web page.
- Encourage sub-committees (task teams) to produce interim reports. This would help identify problems with the charges or methodologies, and is likely to further motivate the sub-committee members and strengthen their resolve.
- Some of the sub-committee reports were finished; needed no polishing. Others were not ... additional work may need to be done in direct coordination with the Chair of the Steering Committee.
- As the document approaches its final (finished) stage, you “need to convert to one voice; to insure flow...”
- You need several reviewers to go through the whole document; the advice of the Steering Committee was often sought.
- The **recommendations** should be well structured and feasible (specific enough to know what need to be done to implement). Accountability is also essential (who should do what, and when?)
- The initial draft (Cumberland County College) contained 112 recommendations! Some were “communications” recommendations; others were “endorsement” (continue to do the following...).
- Recommendations were eventually “combined” and ended up with 72. “No recommendation was removed.”
- To insure proper implementation and accountability, each recommendation had a responsible “administrator”. Implementation dates were specified, and for the most part respected. Reports were produced on the recommendations that were not implemented explaining what need to be done, when, and by whom. As a consequence, the skeptics who initially said “nothing will be accomplished” were assured.
- The visiting team made 12 recommendations; four had to do with the Library.
- The Self-Study led the way to a new strategic plan and ‘new’ mission statement.
- **Conclusion:** The self-study was successful and well received by the college community because of effective communication and credibility in implementing recommendations.

From the question and answer session:

- ‘Outside’ reviewers of the self-study document were not needed.
- Members of the visiting team became permanent friends of the institution.
- How do you handle “personal agendas” (e.g. faculty salaries)? Where do you ‘insert’ them? There was a degree of arm wrestling between those who wanted to include ‘personal agendas’ items and those who did not.

Breakout # 4: Implementation Topics

Linking Self-Study to Planning

Sibolski with Michael A. Mongavero, Vice President for Planning, Institutional Research, and Continuous Improvement, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania.

Mongavero used Edinboro University's planning process and its Institutional Effectiveness Model to illustrate how the self-study could be linked to planning. He placed most of the emphasis on Standard 2 (Planning, Resource Allocation, and institutional Renewal) and Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment). He explained an improvement plan developed by Edinboro University the focus of which were 8 priorities (these included increasing of enrollment to 8,000 students, enhancing technology campus wide, and creating an inclusive planning process that ties budgeting to planning). The thrust of his presentation focused in Edinboro's decision to combine its budget planning committee with the faculty planning committee and then have this combined group solicit a set of goals for the following year from members of the university community. As part of the budget process, these goals were prioritized and costed, and when approved they were announced. The university community was thereafter kept up-to-date regarding the extent to which these goals were met in the course of the following year. Mongavero stressed that the process of publicly announcing goals and setting priorities, and thereafter communicating with the community their rate of achievement had done much to reduce a sense of disunity, of lack of communication, and dissatisfaction among students, faculty and staff.

Breakout # 5: Campus Visits: Teams, Hosting, and Afterwards

Sibolski, Birch, and Hogan

[In accreditation sequence, once the Self-Study Report is done, Team visit follows.]

Regarding the Self-Study Report:

- Insure "wide ownership"; the report should be seen and read by many; input from all. Don't send a 'box' and expect team members to sort it out! Remember: The reviewer is a volunteer.
- The liaison person (CHE staff member appointed by the CHE) is responsible for the selection of the Team Chair. The team, normally, consists of 7 persons [in our case it may consist of fewer members, in view of the distance and other considerations...]. The Chair is normally either a President or a Provost of another institution.
- The institution should mail the documents. Team Chair makes a preliminary visit (about 4 months before the final visit).
- The Self-Study Report should be ready 6 weeks before the team visit.
- Start making arrangements for the visit fairly early. Material such as records, faculty CVs ... should be ready to be viewed by Team members if they need to. Set the schedule; do all the consultations early. Make yourselves available from day one till the end of the visit.

- Arrange for receptions (a reception to meet alumni members is essential). Make computers **and printers** available. Budget the visit a year ahead of time.
- Team ‘gathers’ on Sunday p.m. (schedule a dinner). Monday and Tuesday are “working days”, packed with meetings and interviews. Make sure you know “whom” the team wishes to meet ahead of time [they will tell you]. Tuesday (p.m.) Team members go “somewhere” to write their report. At “Exit Interview” the team members will tell you what they “think” (they will **not** tell you what they intend to recommend). [For Peter heath and Waddah Nasr this narrative was quite familiar: a duplication of the Candidacy Visit that took place at the end of March 2001.]
- Team report will be sent to the institution 2 or 3 weeks after the visit. Institution has a chance to respond.

Peter Heath

Waddah Nasr