

Notes from the April 13, 2007, New Mexico Assessment Task Force meeting, NMU Albuquerque Center, 1 – 3 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Carmen Santana-Melgoza at 1:15 p.m., since snow in Santa Fe had made travel difficult for some task force members. In attendance were Scott Zeuman, Karen Luper, Marsha Lichtenstein, Teresa Crafton, Jary Rupe, Erin O’Neill, Pat Seitz, Julie Bales, Maggie George, and Beth Walker.

1. The group welcomed Dr. Maggie George, who is replacing Dr. Jozi Deleon as the HED liaison to this Task Force. Dr. George gave a brief overview of the most recent meeting of the Articulation Task Force. That group plans to formalize their work, and would like to have a joint meeting with this group. They also encouraged our group to ensure broad representation. The Articulation group had discussed the need for annual review of courses submitted for the matrix. Discipline teams are anticipated to be appointed for two year terms in the future. Dr. George also mentioned that the pdf file on the HED website with the common course numbering has some problems. Plans are to update it soon without common course numbering, but with a list of equivalencies. Dr. George is reviewing the Administrative Code relative to course numbering.
2. Marsha presented information about a consortium based at UNM that deals with BEAMS and NSSE. Two hundred schools are in BEAMS. The challenge is to develop a project to encourage retention that will contain some empirical data. They have MAPS, which is a navigational tool to help students self-identify problems they are facing with staying in school, and get help. It’s web-based. It ought to have a lot of transferability, and is funded by a Title V grant and underwritten by Lumina. Lumina’s next retreat is in NM in July. After UNM attended a previous one, they returned home with a proposal that got funded. The group thinks that WNMU, ENMU, NMSU, and UNM are BEAMS schools, but that this list may not be comprehensive.
3. Carmen reviewed items a-e on the agenda. On e, the point was made that ours are only recommendations, and that January 2008 seems to be our current target for recommending a structure to document compliance by institutions with existing law. Discussion followed that we really don’t have a formal deadline on the communications area, which is due to be reported on first. Many schools don’t have assessment data gathered yet, much yet analyzed. Between a and b on the progress identified on the agenda, we need to add our recommendation that institutions should document/evaluate the common gen ed core on a rotation that meets their needs. Our recommendations to date:
  - a. Each institution will complete a report using their own form to assess the core competencies.
  - b. Institutions should document/evaluate the common gen ed core on a rotation that meets their needs.
  - c. Reports should include the following parts:
    - i. Learning outcome being measured
    - ii. Assessment procedures
    - iii. Assessment results
    - iv. How results were used to make improvements

- d. Institutions should complete the report on a yearly basis and post it to their own website. Each institution is free to use whatever assessment methods they desire.
  - e. The NMHEAR Conference will serve as the yearly event that will bring the state's assessment individuals together to discuss their institution's work in assessment of general education and to share their results.
  - f. We do not recommend that there be any type of monitoring or enforcement policy imposed on institutions relative to their student learning outcomes assessment activities.
4. Dr. George elaborated that some salary increases may become a function of graduation rates, time to graduation, transition to workforce/impact on economy, and may fine-tune performance funding. Discussion followed about some problems there; the example was given that at Santa Fe CC, many students (probably as many as 40%) already have advanced degrees, and they are not interested in graduation or transitioning into the workforce.
  5. This week there was a videoconference on how accreditation may be affected by the Spellings Report. Possibilities presented include the following:
    - a. Increased emphasis on outcomes
    - b. Need to articulate to the general public the value of higher education
    - c. Feds seem to have doubt that AQIP is "real" ~ there seems to be a need to emphasize transparency
    - d. St. Crow (one of the presenters) admitted that criteria are not aligned with national goals, particularly in terms of things like critical thinking
    - e. He also emphasized that assessment must become "hardwired" into higher education
    - f. We need data systems. We seem to be drowning in meaningless data.

A DVD should be made available to participants, which they were encouraged to share. Karen agreed to provide Carmen a copy to share with members of the Task Force. Karen's interpretation was that they seem to be trying to get at student learning data. The Baldrige method seems currently to be favored at the federal level. Much discussion followed on the Baldrige method in higher education. More information is available at <http://baldrige.nist.gov/> and [http://baldrige.nist.gov/PDF\\_files/PrincipalMarApr06Baldrige.pdf](http://baldrige.nist.gov/PDF_files/PrincipalMarApr06Baldrige.pdf) and [http://baldrige.nist.gov/Education\\_Criteria.htm](http://baldrige.nist.gov/Education_Criteria.htm).

6. Assignments about the Spellings Report were reviewed.
  - a. AFT article ~ worthless. AFT's biggest concern is that NCLB will infuse unfunded testing mandates onto higher education.
  - b. UTenn's provost's article ~ lengthy. Sees this as a "feel good" report for bureaucratic minds. Hones in on accountability and being responsible to one's sources of funding. But our data in terms of the value of a liberal arts education are harder to quantify than some other outcomes.
  - c. The article Karen sent out on the liberal arts as a basis for evaluating education may not have made it to the Task Force members. Carmen will send (again?), as well as try to locate another applicable report from 1996.

- d. AASCU ~ this article is “all for” the Spellings Report. They are quite supportive of higher education providing documentable “value added,” and then documenting it. One set of mechanisms is referred to as the Dublin Descriptors.
- e. Letter from ACE, etc. ~ general response addressing seven challenges. For our purposes, we might focus on the section on accreditation, emphasizing outcomes that measure learning. Their thesis seems to be that “the American system of higher education is the best in the world because there is no system.”
- f. President of the teacher education group ~ “we’re already doing this.”
- g. Carnegie Foundation ~ concise; seems to feel that the Spellings Report is “good despite its warts.” We need i) different approaches, ii) the freedom to accept modes of assessment that fit each institution, and iii) reporting without negative consequences.
- h. Nelson ~ St. John’s in Annapolis ~ need to focus on liberal arts, and avoid “utilitarian” education. Education should cover the full span on one’s years, and we should promote the “desire to learn over the mania to test performance; success in passing tests will follow the former as night does the day.” We must stop using the language of the marketplace. Assessment out to be an integral part of learning itself, and left to faculty, staff, and the local institution. Highlights: “The report has forgotten the centrality of the faculty to what we are about in our colleges, and risks leaving on the sidelines of the national dialogue those who most need to be at the heart of the conversation. We will not answer the question about the quality of education by addressing transferability of credits . . . Learning assessment ought to be an integral part of learning itself. ‘Objectivity’ in assessment tools is useless or harmful when it measures nothing essential to the kind of learning we seek to foster . . . This report fails to recognize that its aims - - - economic competitiveness, efficiency, and productivity - - - and not the highest aims of our democratic society, founded on the rights of all to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that education is a means to these goods too . . . The commission’s call for a student unit record database serves none of [these] purposes . . .”
- i. President Sullivan of St. Lawrence University ~ critical of the report. Says it has “no vision,” and represents a “cafeteria grab and go” education. Highlights: “If policy-makers at the federal and state level take the guiding principles of the so-called Spellings Commission Report seriously, it could be the single greatest blow ever landed against the pursuit of excellence defined in terms of student learning outcomes in the history of American higher education . . .” He also suggests that “this very negative and cynical view of American higher education contrasts in important ways with the views of the general public . . . but does represent pretty accurately . . . the views of legislatures, other political leaders, many major corporate leaders, and other opinion leaders . . . [and] where we do need to continue to get better at assessment, access, and performance, this is a signal that we’re going to be left to do it on our own while fighting constant public criticism.” His major criticisms include “There is no vision . . . [or] real grasp . . . of the significant improvements that have been made . . . [or] evident understanding . . . of the differences between published prices and net student costs

[or] the differences between what students and families pay and what higher education costs per student [and] finally, the complete lack of attention to building and sustaining the nation's college and university professoriate is very significant. I believe it can be explained once one realizes that the Commission is really recommending the disestablishment of undergraduate education as we know it, having concluded that the vast majority of students are attending institutions that will not and cannot change, and that these institutions are essentially controlled by faculty – why reproduce and support the very people who have caused most of the trouble? So national strategy has to be 'starve the beast' and free the market up to replace it with more efficient, flexible, and market responsive alternatives."

- j. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education ~ some comments suggested that a problem is that there is no guide to what needs to occur and how, versus others that had they provided a detailed agenda with timelines and outputs, "I can imagine the adverse reaction."
  - k. SHEO ~ concerned about data quality. Say they are ready to assist states.
  - l. AAUP ~ "using university folks for AQIP visits, etc., is like letting the fox into the henhouse to grade it."
7. Carmen expects to change the date for the May meeting, to avoid conflicts with various graduation activities. She also plans to have a directory of Assessmentistas for the May meeting. She asked the group's opinion of having a webpage for us to place information on HED's website. The group seemed to feel that it is a good idea, although we had had doubts earlier (when this group was very new). Carmen plans to draft one for our review.
  8. There was a question about NMHEAR and a "New Mexico Assessment Handbook" referenced on its webpage.
  9. The meeting adjourned at 2:50.

Submitted by Beth Walker, WNMU.