The purpose of the newsletter is to provide information regarding planning and assessment at Texas Tech and other universities.

This issue of the Strategic Planning and Assessment Newsletter includes invited articles from the following individuals:

- Kerry Billingsley – Chair of the Strategic Planning Council
- Sandra Marquez Hall – Director of Planning and Assessment, Division of Student Affairs
- Sharon Kohout and H.D. Stearman – Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness at TTU Health Sciences Center

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**TIMELINE FOR 2006 ASSESSMENT REPORTS**

- April 23, 2007 – Deans and other area leaders reporting to Provost submit reports to Provost
- May 7, 2007 – Provost and Vice Presidents submit reports to President

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**DEADLINE FOR POSTING UPDATED STRATEGIC PLANS**

**MAY 14, 2007**

The revision of area and unit strategic plans must be completed by end of the Spring Semester 2007.

The guidelines for revising the strategic plans have been published in previous newsletters (See February V3 N2, 2007).

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**STRATEGIC PLANNING COUNCIL: CONDUCTING A QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLANS AND ASSESSMENT REPORTS**

By Kerry Billingsley

The fifteen-member Strategic Planning Council welcomed five new members this year: Kathy Nordstrom, Art Olivarez, Andrew Vernooy, Matt Fowler and Zeb Alexander. Council members are appointed by the president to serve a two-year term. Returning members include: Kathy Austin, Thomas Barker, Jaclyn Byrd, Melanie Hart, Sukant Misra and Kerry Billingsley. Ex officio members of the Council include: William Marcy, Gil Reeve, Ronald Phillips and Vicki West.

Each year the Council works on a key project related to strategic planning at the university and makes recommendations to the president. This year’s project is a pilot quality assurance process for planning and assessment at the area and unit levels. The goal is to look for best practices in strategic planning and assessment and share the information with the university community. If there are trends identified that point to process improvements needed, the Council will make recommendations to the president.

The Council has been divided into three committees who will review the strategic plans and assessment reports for two academic areas and several units under each area; and two support areas and several units under those areas.

The committees are looking at the following issues:
1. Are the plans and assessment reports complete?
2. Are the materials meaningful and have the assessment reports been used to improve programs and services?
3. Have the areas and units documented the use of the assessment reports to accomplish needed improvements?

The committees will report the issues and trends they see across areas and units and look for best practices to share with the university community. The committees will review the quality assurance process and make recommendations for improvement. The committees will also use the results to make recommendations for improving the current strategic planning and assessment processes.

**NEED HELP?** The Office of Strategic Planning offers consultation and/or workshops for program assessment and strategic planning. **Contact Dr. Gil Reeve, Director of Strategic Planning (2-2121; Gilmour.Reeve@ttu.edu).**

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**USING SURVEY RESULTS TO IMPROVE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES IN THE DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS**

**By Sandra Marquez Hall**

Division of Student Affairs (DSA) departments routinely conduct multiple types of surveys within the course of each academic year. Findings contribute to the quality enhancement of programs, facilities and services for Texas Tech students, and provide an infrastructure that supports the educational experience. In the spirit of collaboration, many of the results are available for use by Texas Tech students and faculty to support research and assessment. Following is list of recent surveys and brief information about each:

- **Alcohol Edu**—An online alcohol prevention program designed for college students with the goal of preventing or reducing alcohol-related problems. Alcohol Edu provides schools with statistically accurate descriptions of alcohol related attitudes, experiences, behaviors and health education needs of participants.
- **Academic Integrity Survey**—Academic Integrity is a fundamental value of teaching, learning, and scholarship. Yet, there is growing evidence that students cheat and plagiarize. This survey explored the pervasive attitudes of students and faculty toward academic integrity.
- **Cooperative Institute Research Program**—Surveys incoming freshman and provides information on demographic characteristics, expectations of the college experience, secondary school experiences, degree goals and career plans, college finances, attitudes, values, and life goals, and reasons for attending college.
- **College Senior Survey**—Evaluates student satisfaction (with coursework, faculty, staff, administrative services and campus life), collects information on academic and extracurricular experiences of college students; measures retention (leave of absence, withdraw or transfer), understanding of students’ values, attitudes, and goals.
- **Collegiate Readership Survey**—A pilot study, conducted by invitation from Penn State and Educational Benchmarking Inc., that analyzed readership behaviors, measured classroom use of newspapers in college readership programs and provided a benchmark for comparisons to other colleges.
- **Association of Fraternity Advisors/EBI Assessment Survey (AFA/EBI)**—Surveys
performance of sorority and fraternity groups evaluating effectiveness of advising, worthwhile educational programs, and member satisfaction in academic achievement, philanthropy/community service, friendship, and involvement opportunities. **Association of College & University Housing Officers-International**- Assists the university in assessing resident perceptions of the housing program with the goal of continuous quality improvement. **National Association of College and University Food Services**- Annual customer satisfaction and benchmarking survey used as a tool to evaluate university dining operations to insure that they meet or exceed expectations. **National College Health Assessment**- A national research effort organized to assist in the collection of data about students’ habits, behaviors, and perceptions on the most prevalent health topics: alcohol, tobacco and other drug use; sexual health; weight, nutrition and exercise; mental health; injury prevention, personal safety, and violence. **National Survey Student Engagement**- The NSSE is designed to obtain information about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college. **Your First College Year**- Designed as a follow-up to evaluate the impact of First Year Experience programs and administered to second semester freshmen to provide information on the academic and personal development of first-year college students. **Contact Sandra Marquez Hall in the Office of Planning & Assessment for Student Affairs** (www.pasa.ttu.edu) for more information.

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**TTU HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER GEARING UP FOR SACS REVIEW**

**By Sharon Kohout and H.D. Stearman**

Like any other institution that has an on-site reaffirmation visit from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) coming up in the spring of 2009, the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center finds that the pace of its preparations is only intensifying as the date draws nearer.

“We have enlisted the talents and energies of several key people in virtually every department to help in this reaffirmation process” said Sharon Kohout, Director of the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness at TTUHSC, “and the scope of the project keeps us all extremely involved on a day-to-day basis. My to-do list keeps expanding exponentially, and we’re still nearly two years out.”

As an independently accredited health sciences center that offers only upper division/graduate programs, however, TTHUSC does not fit the mold of the traditional universities and community colleges that comprise the vast majority of SACS’ membership.

According to Dr. H.D. Stearman, Associate Director of the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness at TTUHSC, **several characteristics of the institution set it apart and impact its reaffirmation strategy**. “TTUHSC enrolls students who, for the most part, are very qualified academically and highly motivated in their career paths,” Stearman said, and “our admission criteria vary considerably among and within our five schools. Because of our faculty’s affiliation with University Medical Center and other facilities near our regional...
because of the very nature of health-science education, we also don’t assign teaching loads or evaluate faculty in the same ways that traditional colleges do.”

In the 11-state SACS region, which stretches from Virginia to Texas, TTUHSC is one of only eighteen health-related institutions that is not part of a larger university. “We are working closely with SACS to make our distinctive differences clear to everyone concerned,” Kohout pointed out, “but being the exception to the rule complicates the matter.”

Among the initiatives that TTUHSC has undertaken as part of its reaffirmation effort is the purchase of an online database management system to track and document its institutional effectiveness and assessment functions. WEAVE Online, developed by Virginia Tech University, allows every department at TTUHSC to enter electronically its assessment plans and key indicators of success for meeting departmental and institutional goals.

Among the tools that have been newly implemented to provide additional data is an online faculty satisfaction survey that, for the first time ever, is being implemented for all TTUHSC faculty at all six campuses.

Kohout stated that perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of the reaffirmation process is the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). “It is fortunate for us that TTU has already gone through the process of developing its QEP,” said Kohout. “The formation of a broad-based QEP committee is currently underway for the purpose of gathering ideas from faculty, staff, students, alumni and the community on innovative ways to improve student learning at the TTUHSC.” The QEP process will provide TTUHSC with the opportunity to explore and pilot some creative options to ensure that its health professions students are receiving the finest education possible. All institutions in the SACS Region are expected to submit an Impact Report five years following the implementation of the QEP. “Planning is one thing, “ Kohout said, “but showing actual results of improved student learning will be the challenge. Having our faculty and students engaged in every step of the process will be important. The most exciting aspect of the QEP is that we can shape it ourselves – based on the needs of our students.”

Even though the SACS reaffirmation process is time-consuming and complex, it brings faculty, staff, and students together to reflect on different aspects of TTUHSC’s effectiveness in carrying out its mission. Kohout believes this reflection is a good thing: “We never want to get to the point where we think we can’t improve.”

OUTCOMES

ASSESSMENTS OF STUDENT LEARNING

All academic departments and colleges prepared outcomes assessment plans for their degree programs in the Fall Semester, 2005. With the submission of their 2006 Annual Assessment Reports, the academic departments or colleges are to have reported the results of their program assessments. These program assessments will be tracked each year with faculty using the results to improve student learning by revising the degree programs (courses and curricula) as appropriate.

SACS Commission on Colleges continues to monitor Tech’s use of assessment results in four areas. Those areas are:

1. Assessment in the QEP – our ethics initiative;
2. Assessment in the academic colleges and departments to improve programs and services;
3. Assessment in the majors (the use of the program-level assessment plans to improve the academic degree programs);
4. Assessment of educational competencies attained by our students (learning in the general education core).

The preparation and submission of the annual assessment reports is NOT the critical activity in the process. Rather, the most important activity is to use the results to improve programs and then to document in future assessment reports how those results were used to make the improvements. For improvement in programs and services to occur, administrators must engage their faculty and staff in discussions focused on the results of the assessments.

Continuous planning and assessment are important to ensure that our students have the appropriate learning opportunities within all of the academic programs.

A Two–Level Model for Planning and Assessment

The extensive literature on strategic planning and assessment in higher education typically illustrates the strategic planning model as a process cycling from PLAN – IMPLEMENT – ASSESS with the results from the assessment impacting the next planning – implementing stages.

However, at Tech and most other institutions the cyclical process actually involves at least two levels of planning and assessment. That is, the results from an assessment should be used not only by the level that generated the assessment report (the unit) but should be used at the next higher level (the area) with feedback from the area to the unit that submitted the report.

Below is an illustration that shows the two-level model for planning and assessment.

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**Levels of Planning and Assessment**

**Area Level – Planning and Assessment**

- Assessing
- Implementing
- Planning

**Unit Level – Planning and Assessment**

- Assessing
- [Review and use by faculty & staff]
- Implementing
- Planning

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**STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT NEWSLETTER**
The figure of the previous page shows that at both levels the cycle of planning and assessment occurs. Thus, both the area and unit levels are fully involved in the PLAN – IMPLEMENT – ASSESS cycle.

Note that at the unit level, the assessment results are used by the faculty and staff to shape planning and to implement new programs and services.

More importantly, the results from assessment at the unit level also are feed forward to the area level as part of the assessment at that level. The area level leader and her/his staff review the unit reports and incorporate those results into their planning at the area level. Additionally, the area leader provides feedback to the unit by offering guidance, making decisions about the unit, and allocating resources to help advance the programs and services in the unit.

The planning at the unit level results in the changes in the programs and services to better serve the students and to improve the learning opportunities.

As suggested by the two-level model for planning and assessment, the preparation and submission of annual assessment reports is not the most important feature in strategic planning. What is most important is the use of the results from assessment to shape future plans and to revise or develop programs meet our strategic initiatives.

The four strategic initiatives for Texas Tech University are to:

- **Invest in People**,  
- **Enrich the Educational Experience**,  
- **Advance Research and Creative Endeavors**, and  
- **Build Partnerships**.

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**UPDATE ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND REGIONAL ACCREDITING AGENCY NEGOTIATIONS**

The Chronicle of Higher Education and the Inside Higher Education news outlets have reported daily on the discussions between the Department of Education and the non-government accrediting agencies. These discussions focused on how the Department of Education will initiate the recommendations from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. The federal government’s position is that there is a need for accountability for student learning as mandated by external agencies, whereas the regional agencies’ position is that assessment of student learning is best done within each university. How these two positions are resolved will shape higher education over the coming years!

As noted in previous newsletters (see February 2007), the distinction in these positions is important. The government’s position is that national testing within the disciplines would measure student learning and allow for potential students, their parents, and other concerned groups (legislative bodies) to compare performances across universities. The regional accrediting group’s position is that although assessing student learning is critical within the institution, universities are unique in terms of mission, programs, and students that assessing student learning is best done within the institution and under the direction of the faculty within the academic programs.

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