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Introduction

In April 2010, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) hosted a team of evaluators from the NWCCU for its Comprehensive Decennial Evaluation. The team’s final report from that visit included seven commendations and two recommendations. This report describes the specific steps UNLV has taken to respond to Recommendation One.

April 2010 Comprehensive Evaluation Recommendation One

The committee notes that since the 2007 focused interim evaluation visit, significant but uneven progress has been made across the University with respect to educational assessment. However, in order to ensure that gathered data truly lead to appropriate course and program renewal, it is recommended that such additional steps be taken to assign responsibility for implementation at the appropriate administrative level (for example, the deans of the schools and colleges) as will lead to full implementation of, and accountability for, the University's policies on student learning assessment (Standard 2.B and Policy 2.2).

Charge to Deans

The first step in responding to Recommendation One was to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the deans related to assessment. Hence, following receipt of the final visitation report, the Executive Vice President and Provost charged the deans with specific responsibility for implementation of assessment in their schools and colleges. He also indicated that this would become one of the areas in which deans will be assessed in their annual and triennial evaluations.

Additional Steps

In order to apprise the deans of the current status of assessment within the schools and colleges, the director and associate director of the Office of Academic Assessment met individually with deans/associate deans in all schools and colleges to describe the status of assessment within the specific school or college pointing out the areas of uneven progress. They also described the current heavy responsibility placed on unit assessment coordinators who often did not have the authority to require compliance. Discussions were conducted to determine how the dean wanted to move forward in assigning responsibility for full implementation. Finally, feedback was gathered on the best ways the Office of Academic Assessment could support the deans.

To further emphasize the importance of the role of deans as college and school assessment leaders, the Office of Academic Assessment brought Linda Suskie, Vice President of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, to campus as keynote speaker.
speaker for the UNLV Academic Assessment Workshop on May 13, 2010. She challenged the deans to lead their faculty in implementing meaningful assessment plans and to use assessment data to inform program improvement.

**Accountability/Full Implementation**

In response to the Executive Vice President and Provost’s charge, all deans agreed to assume assessment oversight themselves or to do so in conjunction with their assistant or associate dean(s), or designated college assessment coordinator. All deans will hold department chairs/unit leaders accountable for the submission of timely and meaningful assessment plans and reports. Copies of assessment plans and reports will be sent to the dean’s office as well as to the Office of Academic Assessment. Several schools or colleges plan to use existing or newly created committees to review assessment plans and reports as they are submitted. These include curriculum committees, academic affairs committees, unit accreditation committees, assessment committees, or strategic planning committees.

**Ensure that Gathered Data Lead to Appropriate Course and Program Renewal**

UNLV has taken several specific steps to insure that assessment data lead to appropriate course and program renewal. UNLV deans are now leading the process for program improvement within their schools and colleges. Some schools or colleges such as the colleges of Sciences, Education, and Business plan to use an ongoing departmental process to review assessment data and make recommendations while others including Howard R. Hughes College of Engineering, the College Fine Arts, and the School of Dental Medicine plan to include review of assessment data at annual faculty retreats. In addition to review by the dean, most schools and colleges plan to bring recommended action steps to the executive committees of their units for discussion. Some colleges such as Nursing, the William S. Boyd School of Law, and the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration plan to include a review by appropriate college or school committees. Furthermore, most deans will expect chairs to use relevant assessment data to support their program improvement and/or strategic plans.

The new 5-year assessment plans for each degree program must include a description of the **process for program improvement**. A typical process for program improvement might include an annual review of assessment data by faculty, a discussion of implications, determination of action steps, implementation of action steps, and follow-up assessment to determine effectiveness. The School of Nursing has a well-developed program improvement process that they shared with the campus at a recent Academic Assessment Symposium. Assessment reports will include recommended action steps as well as follow-up data on prior action steps.

Positive communication by campus leaders plays an important role in full implementation. In describing their steps to ensure that gathered data lead to
appropriate course and program renewal, several UNLV deans have committed to communicate systematically with their faculty about the importance of meaningful assessment. Furthermore, seven deans or associate deans gave panel presentations at the 5th annual UNLV Academic Assessment Symposium on November 18, 2010 to discuss the infrastructure necessary to support effective assessment within their units and to describe the ways they have used assessment data for program renewal. The deans are leading through public communication about the importance of assessment.

UNLV has also developed an analysis and feedback mechanism to track the use of assessment data for program improvement. Programs will be documenting action steps for program improvement and subsequent implementation and evaluation of those actions in their annual assessment reports. The Office of Academic Assessment will expand its analysis of each plan and report to include a summary report for the deans. The deans will use this information to reinforce adequate and exemplary assessment processes as well as address areas of concern.

Conclusion

UNLV has responded positively to Recommendation One. Assessment responsibility has been assigned at the appropriate administrative levels. Assessment processes have been adapted to facilitate this change. With greater accountability and leadership on the part of the deans, we are already seeing growth in compliance, assessment quality, and overall commitment to using assessment data to improve student learning.