ASSESSMENT IN ACTION

The Providence College Assessment Newsletter

ASSESSMENT: THE ‘WHY’ AND ‘HOW’

While there are many important reasons for the College to engage in assessment, the following are most fundamental from our perspective:

- Formal Linking of Mission, Goals, and Outcomes: Assessment informs decision-making related to mission, plans, and goals.
- Building Evidence: Assessment provides evidence-based answers to questions such as “Are we doing what we say we do?” and “Are we doing well what we say we do?”
- Continuous Improvement: Use of assessment data makes possible continuous improvement.
- Regional Accreditation/Governmental Mandates: Assessment and accountability mandates continue to increase at federal, state, and regional accreditation (NEASC) levels.
- Competition: Constituents are demanding evidence of success and positive outcomes.

In an attempt to measure the attitudes, behaviors, and satisfaction of incoming day school students, current students, and recent graduates, the following are some of the current campus-wide assessments that are being administered by the College:

- Admitted Student Questionnaire (perceptions and evaluations of Providence College by admitted students); last administered Spring/Summer 2011
- Alumni Survey One-Year Out (satisfaction and outcomes of graduates); administered annually; last administered in 2011
- Cooperative Institutional Research Program (characteristics, values, behaviors of incoming students); administered annually; last administered Summer 2011
- EBI/ACUHO-I Resident Study (satisfaction and outcomes of resident students); last administered Spring 2010
- National Survey of Student Engagement (academic engagement of current students); last administered Spring 2011
- Student Satisfaction Inventory (importance of and satisfaction with all aspects of campus life); last administered Spring 2012
- Core Alcohol & Drug Survey (assesses the nature, scope, and consequences of alcohol and other drug use on college campuses); administered annually; last administered Fall 2011
- Alumni Survey One-Year Out, administered annually; last administered Summer 2011

CIP PROGRAM: ‘HELPFUL AND INSIGHTFUL’ PROCESS

Since 2008, several academic departments, programs, and offices have earnestly assessed their adherence to the College’s mission and strategic plan, departmental goals, governance, outcomes, and more through the Continuous Improvement Program (CIP).

Sponsored by the Office of Academic Affairs, CIP review is mandatory for all academic units on a rotating, recurring 7-10 year cycle. It was developed as a tool to promote continuous improvement and effectiveness through meaningful self-study and external, independent evaluation.

In 2010, Dr. Stephen J. Lynch, professor of English and director of the Liberal Arts Honors Program (LAHP),
completed the CIP process for the LAHP. Recently, Lynch reflected on his experience.

“The CIP process forced me to slow down, step aside, and reflect on the whole operation.” – DR. STEPHEN J. LYNCH

What were your feelings about the CIP prior to participating?

To be honest, I saw the CIP as an administrative chore. I was not looking forward to the process, and I did not anticipate that the results would be of much value.

How did those feelings change after the CIP was finished?

Actually, I found the process of gathering information and reflecting on the results enormously beneficial and even enjoyable. Directing a program involves constant busy work—moving from one task to the next and next and next. The CIP process forced me to slow down, step aside, and reflect on the whole operation. Once I got started on the project, I became more and more committed to the value of administrative reflection. I found the faculty and committee meetings on “what we do well” and “what we need to do better” enormously helpful and insightful.

How have the CIP findings helped you since?

The CIP findings confirmed that the Honors Program does a fine job fulfilling our core responsibilities. Courses are well-taught, students are challenged every step of the way, and faculty are committed to the program. The Office of Admission does a superb job recruiting top students, and the retention rate for Honors students is impressively high—94 percent. The program could do a better job, however, in offering a wider range of colloquium courses, getting students actively involved in decision-making and in the running of the program, and in expanding co-curricular enrichment opportunities for students and faculty.

How do you think the CIP fits in with the College’s goal to enhance academic excellence?

I think the CIP is necessary and long overdue. As a faculty member in the humanities, I think that some of what we do cannot possibly be measured or assessed in one satisfactory way. But we need to strive to assess our progress as best we can. Perhaps departments in the sciences and business fields have an easier time of it, but I think that in the humanities we can assess our progress in a variety of imperfect ways that, taken together, can be genuinely informative.

What would you say to other departments that are scheduled to participate?

Think of it as an opportunity to slow down and reflect as a department or program on what you do well and what you could do better.

For more on the CIP, go to internal/assessment/CIP

ASSESSMENT IN THE NEWS: CREDITS & DEGREES POLICIES UPDATE

You may have noticed over the past several months that the U.S. Department of Education and, in response, all regional accrediting bodies, have recently established more comprehensive policies related to credits and degrees (often referred to as “the definition of the credit hour”).

We would encourage you to review the New England Association of Schools and Colleges’ (NEASC) new policy, which took effect July 1, 2011 (cihe.neasc.org/downloads/POLICIES/Pp111_PolicyOnCreditsAndDegrees.pdf).

In light of these changes, we need to review College policies and practices and address any deficiencies or gaps as soon as possible. As such, the Credits and Degrees Workgroup has been convened. The group’s charge is to “Address issues resulting from the U.S. Department of Education’s, and the New England Association of Schools & College’s (NEASC), new policies on ‘credits and degrees,’ and make recommendations on ensuring minimum out-of-class work by students; the minimum number of credit hours by various degrees; and policies regarding joint, dual, and concurrent degrees.”

If you have any comments or questions, contact Brian Bartolini at bbartoli@providence.edu.
WABASH STUDY NEARING COMPLETION

The College’s participation in the Wabash Study (www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/wabash-study-2010-overview/) is in its final stages. You might remember that we have chosen to evaluate students’ writing, using the following Core Curriculum-related outcome: Students should demonstrate the ability to write in a clear, coherent, and well-informed manner.

We will soon make available to the campus community our complete Wabash Study data.

NEASC FIFTH-YEAR REPORT DUE

Brian Bartolini is responsible for drafting the College’s New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) fifth-year interim report (cihe.neasc.org/), which is due August 15, 2012. While he has been compiling information for the report since our comprehensive visit (2007), he may reach out to some of you for assistance. The plan is to make the final reports available to the College community. If you have any questions, please contact Bartolini at bbartoli@providence.edu.

In addition to addressing all 11 standards for accreditation briefly, the College is expected to report demonstrated success in:
• assuring the effectiveness of the College’s faculty evaluation system (continued from 2010 interim report);
• clarifying the role of the College’s mission in the faculty hiring process (continued from 2010 interim report);
• implementing the College’s strategic plan and assuring effective integration of strategic and financial planning;
• achieving its goals for fundraising and diversification of revenue sources;
• implementing a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning, with particular emphasis on the assessment of general studies; and
• achieving the College’s goals for diversifying its student body, faculty, and staff.

The fifth-year report also will include submission of a variety of required data forms, including department-by-department assessment plan details.

CHECK OUT THE INTERNAL ASSESSMENT WEBSITE

The internal assessment website is a resource for Providence College faculty and staff members to stay up-to-date with the latest assessment activities at the College. This continuously updated site features:

• NEASC accreditation-related reports
• Data/results related to PC alumni surveys
• Data/results related to campus-wide surveys
• Information and templates related to the Continuous Improvement Program (CIP)
• Institutional Research data that can be found in the Common Data Set and the Statistical Review
• Information and resources related to the Student Course Ratings Program

Links for the Wabash Study, alumni data, and assessment-related publications also can be found on the website.

In addition to using measures we already administer (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement, Alumni Surveys), a faculty team evaluated more than 400 student papers last summer, using a rubric adapted from the Association of American Colleges & Universities. We will notify you when the data are available and will invite your reaction and comments.

If you have any questions, contact Cathy Gagne at caragao@providence.edu.
CAMPUS SURVEY GUIDELINES

The following guidelines were established in 2006 for the administration of assessment surveys at Providence College:

• The Assessment Program (Brian Bartolini, associate vice president for academic affairs, and Cathy Gagne, assistant director of assessment) is the designated clearinghouse for all College assessment surveys.

• All surveys should be sent to the office for review before they are administered. Feedback will be provided about any potential problems or conflicts about which the department or program may be unaware.

• The proposed date of administration should be clearly indicated in order that the office can determine if it will conflict with any other proposed survey(s).

• The rationale for these guidelines relates to the need for (a) administering surveys in a coordinated fashion, (b) encouraging collaboration among departments and programs when appropriate, and (c) preventing excessive demands being placed on students, faculty, or staff.

If you have any questions, contact Cathy Gagne at caragao@providence.edu.

ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

REGIONAL DATA/INFORMATION

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC): cihe.neasc.org/

New England Board of Higher Education: www.nebhe.org

Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education: www.ribphe.org

NATIONAL DATA/INFORMATION

Association of American Colleges and Universities: www.aacc.org/resources/assessment/index.cfm

American Association of Higher Education Accreditation: www.ahea.org

Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education: aalhe.org/resource-room

Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education: tandfonline.com/toc/caeh20/current


College Board: professionals.collegeboard.com/educator/higher-ed

Council for Higher Education Accreditation: www.chea.org/


Quality Approaches in Higher Education: asq.org/edu/quality-information/journals/


The Education Trust (Interactive Web tool for comparing graduation rates among colleges/universities): www.collegeresults.org