Discussion of Middle States' Report

Would you be interested in a general discussion of Middle States' report to supplement the efforts of the Administration and Assessment Committee, for the following reasons?

1. According to the Middle States Evaluation Team Report, "faculty bear primary responsibility for promoting, facilitating, assuring and evaluating student learning." (See below.)
2. According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, assessment results should be "discussed widely." (See below.)
3. According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the following question should be answered: "Where does the institution appear to be going with assessment?" (See below.)
4. Our monitoring report to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is due by April 1, 2010. (See below.)

Documents and References

Most Recent Middle States Commission Action, June 26, 2008: To reaffirm accreditation and to request a monitoring report due by April 1, 2010 documenting (1) the implementation of an organized, sustained assessment process to evaluate and improve student learning, including assessment of the attainment of learning goals at the course and program level and providing evidence that student learning assessment information is used to improve teaching and learning and (2) evidence of institutional support for assessment activities.

1st May 2008 Middle States Evaluation Team Report, Page 21, Assessment of Student Learning, Recommendations:

Review of the Self-Study and supporting documents as well as interviews with faculty and administrators demonstrate that while there is a strong foundation for assessment of learning outcomes in place at Lincoln University, there is limited and sporadic collection, analysis, utilization and documentation of assessment data to evaluate and improve student learning at the institution. The team concurs with the Self-Study Steering Committee recommendation (February 5, 2008) that faculty bear primary responsibility for promoting, facilitating, assuring and evaluating student learning and recommends that

a) Lincoln University identify a central coordinating unit for assessment of student learning at a sufficiently high level within the organization to support the assessment and improvement of student learning in core courses, academic major programs and co-curricular areas; and

b) Lincoln University fully implement its assessment of student learning in the core curriculum, the major, and co-curricular areas through use of existing data and information; collection and analysis of new data and information; clear and purposeful linkage of data to the goals they are assessing; and use of these results with confidence to
inform decision-making, planning, and improvement of student learning. The team further recommends that this systematic, sustained, and thorough use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative measures be fully documented in writing in keeping with a well-defined timetable for systematic submission of assessment reports and results.

**What Might the Commission and Its Representatives Look For in Assessment Documentation?**

Evaluation team members, reviewers, and Commissioners might look for information on the following questions in an institution's assessment documentation:

1. **Do institutional leaders support and value a culture of assessment?** Is there adequate, ongoing guidance, resources, coordination, and support for assessment? (This may include administrative support, technical support, financial support, professional development, policies and procedures, and governance structures that ensure appropriate collaboration and ownership.)

2. **Are goals, including learning outcomes, clearly articulated at every level: institutional, unit-level, program-level, and course-level?**

3. **Have appropriate assessment processes been implemented for an appropriate proportion of goals?** Do they meet Middle States expectations?

4. **Where assessment processes have not yet been implemented, have appropriate assessment processes been planned?** Are the plans feasible? Are they simple, practical, and sufficiently detailed to engender confidence that they will be implemented as planned? Do they have clear ownership? Are timelines appropriate, or are they either overly ambitious or stretched out too far?

5. **Do assessment results provide convincing evidence that the institution is achieving its mission and goals, including key learning outcomes?**

6. **Have assessment results been shared in useful forms and discussed widely with appropriate constituents?**

7. **Have results led to appropriate decisions and improvements about curricula and pedagogy, programs and services, resource allocation, and institutional goals and plans?**

8. **Have assessment processes been reviewed regularly? Have the reviews led to appropriate decisions and improvements in assessment processes and support for them?**

9. **Where does the institution appear to be going with assessment?** Does it have sufficient engagement and momentum to sustain its assessment processes? Or does it appear that momentum may slow? Are there any significant gaps in assessment
processes, such as key areas where no assessment plans have been developed?

*Assessing Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness: Understanding Middle States Expectations*, pp. 6-7.

© Copyright 2005 by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education

**Quotes:**

1. "Effective assessments are simple rather than elaborate, and they may focus on just a few key goals in each program, unit, and curriculum." (*Assessing Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness: Understanding Middle States Expectations*, Copyright 2005 by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education)

2. "Grades have been, and will continue to be, an excellent indicator of student learning if they are appropriately linked to learning goals." (*Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources*, Second Edition, 2007, Middle States Commission on Higher Education)

3. "Most familiar are direct evaluations of learning that are applied at the course level. Examinations, regardless of format, are designed to be direct evaluations of student learning. As discussed later, grading linked to clear learning goals is a valid and useful form of direct measurement of student learning. At the program level, examinations also are used frequently as direct measures of student learning." (*Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources*, Second Edition, 2007, Middle States Commission on Higher Education)

Safro Kwame