

COUNCIL ON ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT (CAA)

MINUTES, APRIL 15, 2005

LC-31J; 9:30 – 11:00 AM

Present: Malcolm Sherman, Bruce Szelest, Dick Collier, Marjorie Pryse, Sue Faerman, Menoukha Case, William Lanford, Lee Franklin, Kristina Bendikas, Barbara Wilkinson

The committee began with a review of the minutes. The minutes were approved. A suggestion was made that future minutes be taken with names removed. The committee turned its attention to the summary report of the Chemistry Department self-study. The department seems to have a potential problem: graduate students take a long time to degree. It was suggested that there may be departmental conditions that contribute to this, such as graduate students teaching too much. But overall, the Chemistry Department probably has fewer such problems than many other departments. It was noted that Chemistry uses the field accrediting standard (American Chemical Society) as an outcome measure. Concerns were also raised regarding student motivation and funding. The department might look to the ACS for advice, as they may be addressing these issues. Turning to another topic, an examination of grade distributions shows extremely low grades in undergraduate courses. The students taking introductory chemistry courses include non-Chemistry majors, from departments such as Mathematics and Statistics and Biology. The Chemistry Department has a reputation for less than positively embracing undergraduates. The department is losing majors. This means there are fewer students to assess. If standards were reduced to attract a broader audience, it would lead to the department getting less able students, which would result in lower scores. There is evidence, however, that the Chemistry faculty who teach Organic Chemistry have very different grade distributions, and SIRF reports. Undergraduate teaching should be assessed. Assessment should be able to confirm these patterns, and ultimately improve teaching and curriculum. There are study groups available through the university in chemistry, chemistry courses currently have liberal drop dates, and the data show that the average grade is a C. Other schools don't have this problem. Returning to the initial finding of few graduates, no reason is stated. The committee also asked whether interdisciplinary students are being assessed. Other departments have explicitly addressed this situation in their reports. It was noted that a suggestion made in the report from the external reviewers was missing. One of the external reviewers suggested that the Chemistry Department hire a Chemistry educator. A Chemistry educator has a Ph.D. in Chemistry but is less interested in research than teaching. There would be no lab or start up costs, as they would run courses and study groups. This may or may not be a solution here, as the current faculty may then take teaching less seriously. EOP used a similar model when they offered intensive courses with faculty or adjuncts who were not heavily involved in research. The subcommittee did not review the Department of Chemistry external reviewer report, as a decision was made to attempt entry in the process earlier so the department could receive committee feedback prior to sending their report to the external reviewers. Perhaps it is better for the subcommittee to review the documents later. The subcommittee will review the Chemistry external reviewer report and revise their summary.

The committee moved to the next item on the agenda: the procedures for responding to external requests for the self-study and other documents that are generated by an assessment. Since we cannot effectively limit access to such documents to faculty and administrators, the goal of the policy adopted is to slow things down a little when external requests come. In addition to the list of people to be notified when an outside party requests assessment data, it was suggested that the appropriate department chair be added, which is part of the motion. It was noted that having the self-study documents on file will be useful and increasingly so. Some departments have requested copies of reports be sent to them. In the spirit of helpfulness, we have sent some. Perhaps the committee could consider whether the procedure should include sending them by email. The problem with this, however, is that electronic copies are not the full picture, and they can be disseminated instantly. This may not be what we want to do. There is precedent for the chair of one department to communicate with another to gain access to their self-study. It was noted that, in general, more impediments to outside access may attract reporter attention. It may also be better to give the whole report than the required charts. The committee approved the revised wording of the procedures for requesting self-study documents.

The motion unanimously adopted was:

Departmental self study reports, reports of outside evaluators and departmental annual assessment reviews shall be permanently stored at the offices of CETL. However, the Director of Assessment may elect to keep the most recent documents in her or his office. All University at Albany faculty and administrators shall have on-site access to these documents. Other persons may secure access by filing a request that specifies the documents to be examined with the Director of Assessment, who shall inform the Assistant Vice President for Strategic Planning and Assessment, the Chair of the Council on Academic Assessment, and the appropriate department chair. Requests to make photo copies of these documents shall be made to the Director of Assessment.

It was noted that there ought to be a list of bare minimum information to be included in these reviews. In the past, chart templates were offered to departments. Institutional Research provides the information in a spread sheet.

The committee moved to the next agenda item: the campus received a letter from Provost Salins complementing the campus on assessment activities. The provost sent a copy of this letter to the CAA chair, with a cover letter complementing the work of this committee. In the letter it asks us to set up mechanisms for annual or bi-annual reports to ensure follow through.

The committee returned to the topic of teaching related issues brought up in the Chemistry Department review. It was noted that sources such as Female Friendly Science by Rosser offers useful suggestions. Research has shown the effectiveness of these types of approaches, though the issue is still disputed. An additional issue is the department treatment of minors (as opposed to students majoring in the field). It was noted that as a group, minors are difficult to find. The department may receive lists, but

students are not connected to the department, and they may not declare their minor until the end of their studies. We need to begin to think about how to begin looking at minors. Perhaps advisement is an issue.

An announcement was made that the President's office and the School of Education are beginning to develop a workshop on assessment. It was suggested that the CAA committee be brought on as a co-sponsor. It will likely be scheduled for fall 2005.

Respectfully submitted by Barbara Wilkinson