Next Steps: Now that the Focused Visit is Behind Us

While the entire campus community should take great pride in what it has accomplished in student learning outcomes assessment and strategic planning over the last four plus years, it is important that we not become complacent. Success creates its own new obligation. A full Higher Learning Commission site visit will occur in 2011. Preparation of the comprehensive self-study will begin a year or more before that. Lest you think that 2011 is a long way off, simply remind yourself how quickly the last five years flew by. Having met the standard for accreditation in 2006, the HLC team will expect to see five additional years of ongoing assessment, strategic planning, and program improvement when they return in 2011. While our challenge for the last five years was “to catch up”, our challenge for the next five years is “to find a comfortable sustaining rhythm” for these activities.

Here are some important next steps…

- **Establish a Sustainable Assessment Cycle for all Majors and Minors**

  There are a few majors or minors that still need to develop a viable assessment plan. Work with these programs will begin this summer and continue into the Fall. Other programs may want to modify their plan based on prior experience and the OIE is ready to help here too. For most, however, the challenge is simply to sustain student learning outcomes assessment over the next five years and beyond. Because future program reviews will look more closely at program assessment efforts, a 2 ½ year assessment cycle seems reasonable for most programs. In other words, submission of two assessment reports before 2011 (one written in conjunction with the program review, the other roughly 2 ½ years after the last and 2 ½ years before the next review) would seem to be a reasonable target expectation for every academic program.

- **Document Program Improvement Based on Assessment**

  It is inappropriate to conclude too much from a single data collection. For this reason, our Focused Visit claims about program improvements based on assessment data were justifiably modest. By 2011, however, clear patterns should have begun to emerge based on several iterations of data collection and analysis. Consistent findings over several plan administrations should increase our confidence in the data, identifying consistent strengths as well as targets for improvement. While the Focused Visit Team understood and accepted the fact that our assessment efforts were still maturing, the 2011 team will expect to see program improvement and follow-up based on 10 years of ongoing assessment.

- **Initiate General Education Cycle II**

  Whether the General Education Program evolves over the next few years or not, we need to document both ongoing assessment and as well as program effectiveness in the next self-study.

- **Implement Student Life Competency Model & Assess Student Learning**

  Student Life has developed an innovative integrated model which unifies its many diverse programs under the SNC Mission Statement. This model was well received by the Focused Visit Team and should be fully implemented and used as a framework for assessing Student Life programs.

- **Update & Distribute Program Review Data Annually**

  OIE’s goal is to annually update all program review data for all academic units. This will allow program faculty to monitor indicators, anticipate issues, and act on a continuous basis and before their program review, rather than after.

- **Conduct New Institutional Assessments (e.g. Mission Effectiveness, Minority, First Generation, and Gender Differences)**

  OIE’s ability to provide data support for institutional decision-making will continue to expand. Higher Education Institutions are experiencing an increasing pressure to prove their worth. An overall assessment of “mission effectiveness” will be critical for the next self-study. Further articulation of SPRAAC’s data needs will be essential to ongoing strategic plan renewal and monitoring.

- **Document SNC’s Effectiveness**

  In recent years, the Higher Learning Commission has focused on developing assessment and strategic planning infrastructure. This is likely to change given the pressure accreditation agencies are feeling from the federal government to hold IHE’s (continued on Page 2)
Next Steps: Now that the Focused Visit is Behind Us  
(Continued from Page 1)
accountable. In the next five years, we will need to figure out how to summarize what we have learned about student learning at St. Norbert College across many diverse programs utilizing diverse assessment strategies.

- Implement an Electronic Process for Ongoing Strategic Plan Renewal

SPRAAC is developing a straightforward electronic process for updating the strategic plan based on community input. Implementation of this process assures that a dynamic and current strategic plan informs campus decision-making as well as budget development.

- Secure Full Institutional Funding for a Continuing OIE

SNC has assumed an increasing percentage of Title III funding each year of the grant. The 2006-2007 budget provides College operating funds equal to about half of the proposed continuing OIE budget (the rest will be covered by grant carryover dollars). As a result, the community will see only minor changes in OIE services next year. The OIE will continue in some form, but the 2007-2008 budget deliberations will determine the scope of future OIE activities.

SOOT RATINGS: Does Type of Course Matter?

By: Dr. John A. Williamsen

The widespread use of student ratings to evaluate teaching in higher education has always been accompanied by questions about factors that influence them. The concern is that extraneous variables might color student opinions about a particular course taught by a particular instructor and thereby obscure or distort the meaning of the results obtained. Information of uncertain validity is difficult to use effectively, either for individual improvement or group comparisons.

At St. Norbert, results from our Student Opinions of Teaching (SOOT) survey instrument have been provided to SNC faculty for a number of years. However, few in-house studies has been conducted to explore issues related to the interpretation and meaning of the information sent to instructors whose courses have been “SOOTed”—until now, that is. Drs. Paul Schnorr and Matt Stolak are investigating a wide range of potential factors affecting SOOT ratings and we will report on their findings as they become available.

In the interim, we would like to respond to a recently-received faculty question regarding differences—if any—between SOOT ratings of General Education courses and other course types. Using summary information supplied by Computer Services for SOOTs administered in Spring, 2003-2004 and Fall, 2004-2005, we compared SOOT item averages by course type (i.e., major, minor, elective, Gen Ed).

The two charts on page 5 (based on data from the two SOOT administrations noted above) are designed to allow a visual comparison of the four course types on seventeen individual items and three “overall” summary items from our current SOOT survey.

The large amount of information squeezed into the two charts gives an initial impression of clutter. If the complexity of the charts is off-putting, here are some broad observations that might be drawn from an initial visual inspection:

- Ratings of major, minor, and elective courses are often indistinguishable from each other.
- When ratings of General Education courses are compared with the other three types, they are never the highest and usually the lowest.
- Ratings of General Education courses are noticeably lower for items related to student interest in the course (“Stud Interest”), class participation (“Participation”), and understanding of course material (“Understanding”).
- General Education courses taken in spring have more items distinguishably lower from the other three course types than those taken in fall.
- Courses taken as electives have at least as high—and sometimes higher ratings—than those taken in the major or minor.

What conclusion might be suggested by the observations above? A case can be made that courses taken as electives, part of the minor, or as fulfillment of the major are perceived by students as more freely chosen than those mandated or prescribed as part of our general education program. The personal initiative involved with the choice of a major or—perhaps even more—with the decision to take an unre-quired minor or select electives is associated with more favorable ratings on at least some SOOT items when compared with the prescribed courses or content areas in our General Education Program.

Of course life may not be this simple. We do not yet have evidence to determine if the level of faculty interest and preparation in teaching General Education courses is different from that associated with teaching courses in the major or minor, for example. Nor do we have information allowing for separate comparisons of SOOT ratings of upper and lower biennium General Education courses vis a vis other course types. Further, what role, if any, does class year play in SOOT ratings? Do General Education courses taken by freshmen receive reliably different ratings than those taken by students who will soon be graduating? Do any of these factors (or others) explain the differences observed in our two charts?

The simple answer is we do not yet know, although the Schnorr & Stolak study may provide clues. In the meantime, persons involved with faculty evaluation or program review may simply find it helpful to be aware of the information provided above and use it as appropriate.

Assessment Resources

Robert A. Rutter, A.V.P. for Institutional Effectiveness (403-3964)
Jack Williamsen, Retention Coordinator/Data Analyst (403-3993)
Patricia Wery, Administrative Assistant (403-3855)
Joanne Blascak, Data Retrieval Specialist (403-3238)
Deborah Anderson, Natural Sciences Assessment Specialist (403-3199)
Ray Zarawski, Academic Programs Assessment Specialist (403-3202)
Nicholas Gilson, Student Research Assistant (403-3855)
Travis Vanden Heuvel, Student Research Assistant (403-3855)
Excerpts from the Higher Learning Commission Report

I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT

A. Purpose of Visit
The purpose of this focused visit was to (1) evaluate the presence of a concrete and comprehensive strategic plan and (2) to evaluate the integration of the assessment of student achievement into the campus culture.

B. Accreditation Status
St. Norbert College (SNC) was first accredited by the North Central Association as a junior college in 1934 and then as a four year college in 1937. The last re-accreditation visit was in December 2001. That visit resulted in extended accreditation with the next comprehensive visit scheduled for 2011-2012. A mandated focus visit was called for in the 2001 visit.

C. Organizational Context
According to the SNC website, St. Norbert College is a Catholic, liberal arts college embracing the Norbertine tradition of community and is committed to providing an educational environment that is intellectually, spiritually and personally challenging. St. Norbert College was founded in 1898, when Abbot Bernard Pennings, a Dutch immigrant priest, founded the College to train young men for the priesthood. Abbot Pennings soon discovered a need for higher education in northeastern Wisconsin and started a commerce program for lay students. Coeducational since 1952, SNC is private, nonprofit, and residential offering the liberal arts and sciences with more than 40 areas of study. Located on the banks of the Fox River in De Pere, Wis. (a residential community of 22,000), SNC has 1,987 undergraduate students, 63 graduate students and a student-to-faculty ratio of 14:1. The college has an average class size of 20 and has students from 22 states and 16 foreign countries.

D. Unique Aspects of Visit
None

E. Interactions with Organizational Constituencies
President
Dean of the College & Academic Vice President
Vice President of Student Life
Vice President of College Advancement
Vice President of Mission & Heritage
Associate Dean of Humanities & Fine Arts
Associate Dean of Social Sciences
Associate Dean of Natural Sciences
Associate Dean for International Education
Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness
Retention Coordinator/Data Analyst
Natural Sciences Assessment Specialist
Chair of Assessment Committee & Director of Academic Support Services
Professor of Economics & SPRAAC Co-Chair
Director of Investment Management & SPRAAC Co-Chair
Administrative Assistant Office of Institutional Effectiveness
Professor of Economics, Strategic Planning & SPRAAC Co-Chair
OIE Faculty and Staff
Vice President of Business & Finance
Vice President for College Advancement
Director for Peace & Justice
Director for Campus Ministry
Heidgen Chair for Religious Studies
Director of Academic Support Services
Director Investment Management
Student Life Assessment Representative
Registrar
Controller
Director of Health Services
Student Government Representative
Associate Director of Dining Services
Cataloging Management Specialist
Gift Coordinator
Interim Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management
Alumni
Assistant Assessment Specialist
Office Manager for Humanities
Discipline Assessment Coordinators (faculty)

F. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed
The team reviewed a well-prepared document which clearly articulated patterns of evidence to support the fulfillment of each HLC criterion. Excellent web-based presentations facilitated the work of the team.

II. Areas of Focus

A-1. Statement of Focus: Assessment of Student Learning
The comprehensive accreditation review completed in 2001 contained the following statement: “. . . the failure to integrate assessment of student achievement into the campus culture, prompted the team to stipulate a focused visit to be scheduled in 2005-2006.”

The focused visit team concluded that St. Norbert College has demonstrated substantial progress in the development and execution of a program to integrate assessment of student learning into the campus culture.

B-1. Evidence that demonstrates the criterion is met
1. Appropriate infrastructure has been created to facilitate the assessment effort. Specifically, SNC created the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) an Assessment Committee, and Discipline Assessment Coordinators.
Excerpts from The Higher Learning
Commission Report  (Continued from Page 4)

2. Funding for the assessment effort was secured through
the successful application for Title III support and the
college operating budget.

3. As the Title III grant expires, the college has committed
institutional funds to continue to fund assessment activi-
ties at a sustainable level.

4. The large majority of academic and student life units are
involved with systematic assessment of student learning.
One third of those units are strongly committed to and
engaged in the assessment process. Fifty percent of the
units use OIE funds and benefit directly from OIE ser-
vice.

5. There is a strong and growing link between assessment
of student learning and academic program review.

6. The college has been successful in keeping assessment
of student learning separate from personnel evaluation
processes on campus.

7. Resource reallocation based on data driven assessment
is occurring on a limited basis.

8. The college is working to develop a working relation-
ship between institutional research and assessment of
student learning.

9. The OIE in particular and the assessment effort in gen-
eral has extraordinarily strong leadership.

10. Assessment is occurring in student life, but a stronger
form of assessment will be in place when the student life
competency model (including a strong learning assess-
ment protocol) is rolled out in 2007.

11. The president and the leadership team are very suppor-
tive of an active and effective program of assessment of
student learning.

12. In academic departments at SNC assessment has
broadth, i.e., virtually all academic programs assess stu-
dent learning. The depth of assessment in some aca-
demic units was stunningly creative and strong. While
questions of overall quality in the assessment of student
learning remain, e.g., the presence of direct measures,
the use of standardized instruments, and the frequency
of baseline data, the college has clearly and definitively
embraced the ethos of student learning assessment.

A-2. Statement of Focus: Strategic Planning
The comprehensive accreditation review completed in
2001 contained the following statement: “The pressing
need for a comprehensive and concrete strategic plan
to guide decisions about future goals for the college and
the means to achieve these goals...prompted the team to
stipulate a focused visit to be scheduled in 2005-2006.
The focused visit team concluded that St. Norbert Col-
lege has demonstrated substantial progress in the develop-
ment and implementation of an institutional strategic
planning process.

B-2. Evidence that demonstrates the criterion is met:
1. With clarity, vigor and campus-wide participation, SNC,
since August 2003 has crafted a well-defined, compre-
ensive and concrete strategic plan.

2. This plan is supporting the institution in fulfilling its mis-
sion and achieving its aspirations.

3. Administration, faculty and staff leadership are to be
commended for their thoroughness and diligence in creat-
ing planning processes which are becoming imbedded
in institutional culture and practice.

4. With some limited, specific concerns the team believes
SNC is fulfilling criterion II by allocating resources to
fulfill its mission, improve the quality of education, and
respond to future challenges and opportunities.

5. A redefined mission and vision statement is informing
planning and resource allocation.

6. The creation of The Strategic Planning and Resource Al-
location Advisory Committee (SPRAAC) facilitates pri-
oritization of plan goals and regularly assesses plan pro-
gress.

7. The linking of plan goals to the annual operational budget
is occurring.

8. The College has identified the costs associated with each
strategic plan goal and has provided a time horizon of
five years for the allocation of funding to support each
goal.

9. The College has created processes which enable regular
assessment and reprioritization of goals based upon inter-
nal and external assessment of the environment, the cir-
cumstances, and the emerging opportunities.

10. There are well-defined and clearly understood and ac-
cepted processes for decision making.

11. There is abundant evidence that the plan has become
imbedded in the operations of the college.

C. Other accreditation Issues
None

D. Recommendation of Team
The team recommends to the HLC that St. Norbert College
has met the mandate set forth by the 2001 comprehensive
accreditation team in the areas of assessment of student
learning and strategic planning. No commission follow-up is
recommended.

E. Rational for Recommendation
The rationale for this recommendation is summarized in the
following points:

1. St. Norbert College has developed a comprehensive
and effective process for the assessment of student
learning.

2. St. Norbert College has developed the infrastructure
and funding necessary to maintain this program of
assessment of student learning.

3. St. Norbert College has developed a comprehensive
and effective process for institutional strategic plan-
ing.

4. St. Norbert College has developed the infrastructure
and funding necessary to maintain this strategic plan-
ing effort.
ST. NORBERT COLLEGE PEER & ASPIRANT LIST

The AAC recently approved new Peer and Aspirant Lists for St. Norbert College. Based on community response to a April, 2005 survey on peer characteristics, these lists were empirically derived by SPRAAC through a multi-step process using the IPEDs Executive Tool Kit, Common Data Set Indicators, and other information gleaned from institutional web sites. A Peer Institution is similar to St. Norbert College in Carnegie classification, size, budget, endowment, percent receiving financial aid, and percent residential. An Aspirant Institution is one that is like St. Norbert College (Carnegie classification, size, budget, endowment, percent receiving financial aid, and percent residential), but exceeds SNC on multiple quality indicators (e.g. average ACT, graduation rate, percent full-time faculty, faculty with terminal degrees, student/faculty ratio, classes with fewer than 20 students, Phi Beta Kappa). The lists with supporting detail appear below. The new Peer and Aspirant Lists will be used for program review and in future comparative analyses.

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<th>CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>TOTAL UGS</th>
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<th>ENDOWMENT VALUE</th>
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<th>SIX-YEAR GRAD RATE</th>
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APRIL 2006

Approved 4/10/2006