Use and Impact of a Quality Enhancement System: A Tale of Two Universities

Colorado State University

University of Nebraska Lincoln

HLC/NCA 2007 Annual Meeting

Session Goal

Provide a variety of perspectives about and experiences with an online management system developed at CSU and adopted by UNL.

1st Session – Description of the system and its implementation at two institutions

2nd Session – College perspectives on usefulness of system adoption, lessons learned, and future ambitions for collaboration

Presenters

Colorado State University (CSU)

Kim Bender, Director of Assessment

Tom Siller, Associate Dean of Engineering

University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL)

Jessica Jonson, Assessment Coordinator

Nancy Mitchell, Professor of Advertising

Key Themes

Theme: Accountability for Process (Context)

"Organizations (should) assess student learning in meaningful, useful, and workable ways to evaluate how they are achieving their commitments and to act on the results in ways that advance student learning and improve educational quality" (HLC/NCA Handbook and Peer Review Manual)

Key Themes

Theme 1: Accountability for Process

"Peer reviewers will not approach the review with expectations of specific ways in which assessment efforts are structured and implemented, since it is both inevitable and desirable that diverse organizations exhibit a wide variety of approaches and embed assessment of student learning in a variety of institutional forms and processes"
(HLC/NCA Handbook & Peer Review Manual)

Key Themes

Theme 2: Connecting Assessment and Program Review

"Traditionally, program reviews focus on curriculum or resources needs, such as the need for additional courses, faculty, or library holdings…But it is not always clear that the addition of new courses or faculty will lead to greater learning effectiveness. Such reviews have not addressed the multiple dimensions of effectiveness of the program or unit, such as retention, graduation rates, and achievement of learning or other outcomes." (Wolff 2006)

Key Themes

Theme 3: Faculty Ownership & Engagement

"Involving stakeholders and preparing them to make decisions not only about how (assessment) is designed and carried out but how the findings are to be used is worthy of more attention than are the mechanics of implementing the (assessment) and disseminating the results." (Banta 2002)

A Sampling of Institutional Experience

- Negative factors of higher education's past quality enhancement processes
- What is does systematic mean to us?
- Identify Quality Enhancement System (QES) characteristics at your institution

Reasons to Develop a QES

Derek Bok <u>Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More</u>

Most successful organizations today, regardless of the work they do, are trying hard to become effective 'learning organizations' that engage in an ongoing process of improvement by constantly evaluating their performance, identifying problems, trying various remedies, measuring their success, discarding those that do not work, and incorporating those that do. In theory, universities should be leaders in such efforts, since they have pioneered developing methods for evaluating other institutions in the society. In fact, however, they leave a lot to be desired when it comes to working systematically to improve their own performance. (Bok (2006, p. 316)."

Reasons to Develop a QES

- **Develop an organizational learning environment to accelerate the rate of improvement and innovation through institutional planning and routine self-evaluation (collaborative inquiry)**
- Systematically strengthen academic departmental impact (student learning, faculty research, and faculty service)
- Integrate levels of planning (e.g., annual assessment, program review & strategic planning) to focus intent and accelerate organizational action
  - Speech Communication Demonstration

Reasons to Develop a QES

- Prepare for increasing global competition (graduate student recruitment & demonstrating unit impact)
- Develop evidence systematically to simultaneously satisfy the multiple criteria of quality monitoring groups (economize faculty effort)
- Respond to the emerging accountability emphasis on the part of higher education associations
  - NASULGC

    Toward a Public Universities and Colleges Voluntary System of Accountability for Undergraduate Education

    (A NASULGC and AASCU Discussion Draft)
  - AGB Association of Governing Boards

    Boards should determine that systematic and rigorous assessments of the quality of all educational programs are conducted periodically, and board members should receive the results of such assessments.

Common Characteristics of a QES

1. Concept Model for Communication of Processes
2. Annual On-Line Building Platform
3. Process Steps &Time Lines Monitored
4. Selecting and Configuring Evidence
5. **Aligning Assessment Plans with Program Review Self-Studies**
6. Multiple Review Levels to Ensure Compliance with Quality Standards
7. Documentation of Program Changes & Improvement Dialogues
8. Research Tools & Best Practices Shared
9. External Engagement Web Site For Multiple Audiences
10. Reports Generated on Planning Process Performance

QES Implementation at CSU

- Phase One
  - Institution Profile
  - Motivation
  - Implementation Strategy
  - HLC Accreditation
- Phase Two
  - Portability
  - Reinforcing sustainability
  - Problems
  - An emerging comeback?

UNL's Adoption

PEARL – Program Excellence through Assessment, Research and Learning

- 2nd year of implementation
- College-led
- Focus on learning outcomes

UNL's Adoption

Why: Compliance to Commitment

- Shift episodic to continuous
- Shift individual to collective
- Internal realization of value
- Dialogue within and across faculty and programs
- Better documentation and support mechanism

UNL's Adoption

How: Faculty Engagement & Understanding

- Raise understanding of what effective assessment processes are at UNL

UNL's Adoption

How: Faculty Engagement & Understanding

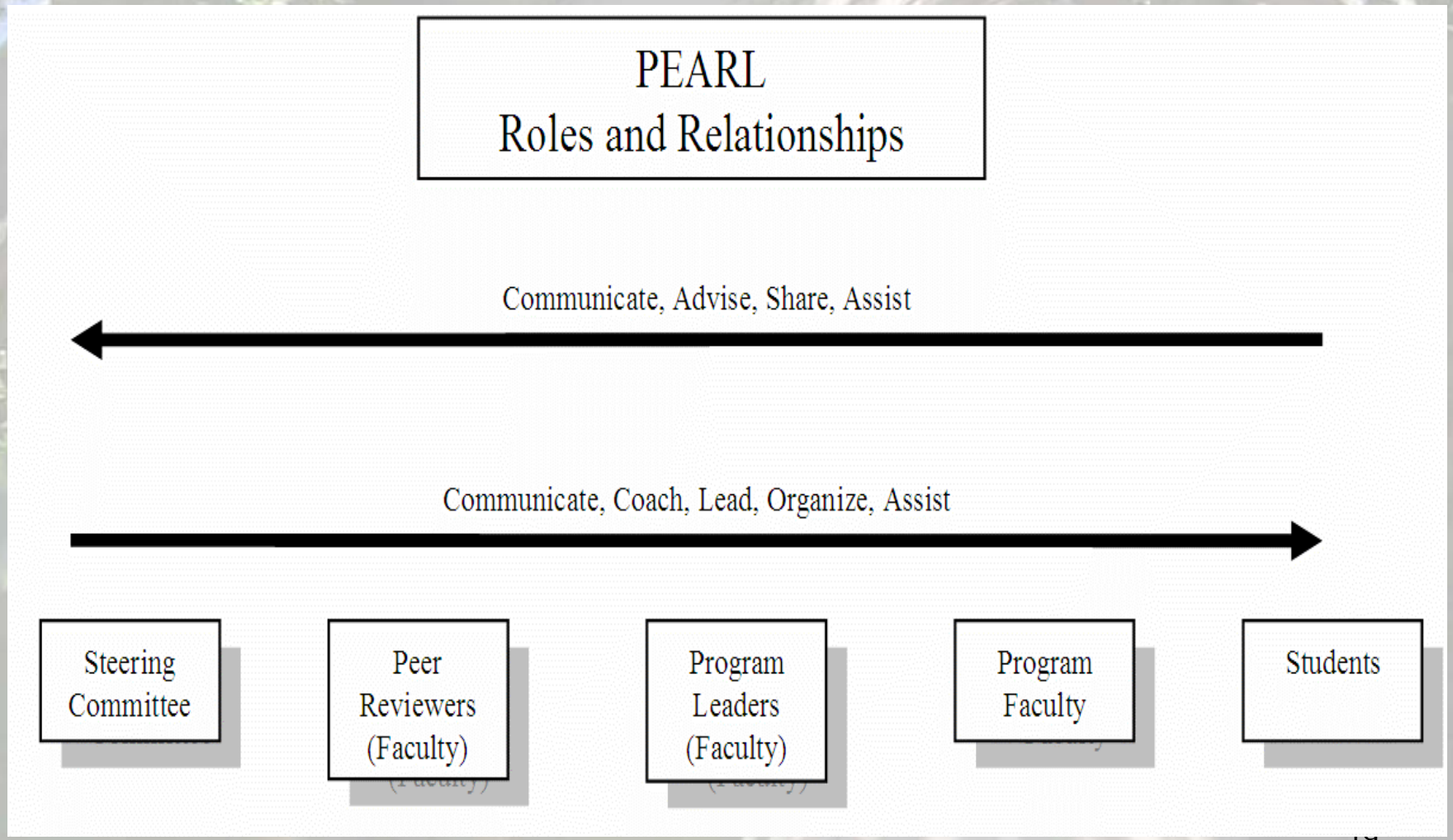
- Encourage dialogue within and across programs

UNL's Adoption

How: Faculty Engagement & Understanding

- Develop faculty leadership

UNL's Adoption



UNL's Adoption

How: Connection with Program Review

- Coordinate documentation for multiple reporting requirements
- Spread out process over time
- Demonstrate continuous, evolving development over time

UNL's Adoption

How: Accountability

- Previous institutional evidence
- Evidence: Internal audiences
- Evidence: External audiences

Session Break/Questions

10 minute break

Resume presentation

at 2:30 pm

Re-Introduction

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College Perspectives

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Associate Dean

College of Engineering

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Nancy Mitchell

Professor of Advertising

College of Journalism and Mass Communications

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Synergies of Collaboration

Current Collaborations

- Best Practices
- Learning Research and Evaluation Instruments
- Assessment Plans
- License Extension

UNL Lessons Learned

PEARL - Areas of Success

Raised level of shared understanding of what outcomes-based assessment is about

UNL Lessons Learned

"Initially [faculty in my program] were reluctant [to participate]…we discussed that it was to be grass-roots, involve far more faculty in the process than just 1 or 2 members of the department, and how it really addressed issues we've been thinking about for 20 years, and it gave us a formal way to approach those [issues}. [That discussion] helped - it became a positive process within the department…it turned it around."

UNL Lessons Learned

PEARL - Areas of Success

Inspired department interest and engagement

"***PEARL helped me understand that assessment doesn't necessarily interest faculty but using it as a tool to gain insights about and improve the curriculum does."***

UNL Lessons Learned

"Every year we have a teaching retreat where we discuss issues that are troubling us, or hurdles that you want to get over in terms of curriculum development or renewal, and we've never had a structure for that. The PEARL website and that PEARL handbook was a huge help, people saw it and said, "wow this is really useful, there are some great tips in here"…

UNL Lessons Learned

…These are a bunch of soil scientists, plant genomics people and none of us really have any experience in putting our curriculum together let alone have any formal background in education. So it really helped us a lot…we had a tool, some structure we could put on the process that we really never had before and that's really what helped."

UNL Lessons Learned

PEARL – Areas of Improvement

Program Leader development

"The initial getting-to-know-PEARL type sessions were good for the mechanics but at that point I kind of felt abandoned. It seems like there could have been something else where I could have presented a first draft or some sketchy ideas to someone."

UNL Lessons Learned

PEARL – Areas of Improvement

Keeping the process on track

"It was difficult to know when it was your turn. We need some process of notification."

"I had difficulty setting timelines for myself and would like some formal meetings that would prompt me to complete my reviews."

Lessons Learned at CSU

Practices That Slowed Progress

- Wrong Messages Given to Some Faculty
- Emphasis on Infrastructure Development vs. Human Organizational Development
- Faculty Orientation Was Not Fully Engaged

Areas for Improvement

- Expanding Student Knowledge of the Process
- Engage the Department Head Training Activities
- Peer-Review Roles Expanded to Include Evaluation as Leadership Training
- Begin Emphasis on the Methods of Student Learning Preparation

Future Ambitions

- Develop Annual Meetings & Retreats As Rituals
- Explore Peer Review Exchanges/Interactions
- Share Department Impact Indicators
- Trade Innovations in Database Functionality & Development of Human Organization Methods
- Identify and Share Best Practices on Coordinating Evidence Development for Quality Monitoring Bodies
- Research QES Impact on Faculty Culture
  - Measuring system presence in areas, such as the teaching and learning centers, mention of system in NSF or other grant proposals, institutional service awards, presentation on college or department Web sites, department database systems related to the system and others.

Audience Discussion

Questions

Thank you for attending!

Presenter Contacts & Web Site URLs

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PRISM URL: **http://assessment.colostate.edu**
(to demo functionality--log-in w/ demo for both username and password)
PEARL URL: **http://pearl.unl.edu**

Session PowerPoint & PEARL
www.unl.edu/ous/faculty_resources/assessment.shtml