Holy Family UNIVERSITY

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Assessment Now

Newsletter of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

New Accreditation Cycle for Middle States Commission on Higher Education

By Chad L. May, Director

In December 2016 I attended the Middle States Commission on Higher Education Annual Meeting where they unveiled the new accreditation cycle for affiliated institutions. Prior to finalizing the new process, the Commission held five open Town Hall meetings across the middle states region. The Town Hall meetings had 648 attendees across all five, the most in MSCHE history, and over 350 institutions were represented which is more than two-thirds of MSCHE member institutions. Each of those meetings informed the committee, and the details of the process evolved. This was a collegial and inclusive process and one that has received a positive vote by member presidents and will guide Commission Staff into actualization. The power point presentation that was given by Robert K. Clark, Chair of the Commission's Committee on Process Change is available online, follow the link below, http://www.msche.org/documents/AnnConfProcessChange2016.pdf.

Here is a top level summary of the changes to the accreditation process. Institutions that are already accredited will follow this new cycle after 2017-18 academic/fiscal year. The ten-year self-study cycle with a mid-point, five-year periodic review report is being replaced with an 8-year self-study cycle with a mid-point, 4-year external review, no institutional written report at the mid-point. However, the annual institutional profile, and submission of some common data about the institution that included enrollment, faculty headcount, study abroad, credit hours, and some financial information from IPEDS and our audited financial statements, is being replaced with a much more robust annual institutional update. This new Annual Institutional Update (AIU) will include more financial measures as well as student achievement measures. The new measures will have multiple components, some required and some voluntary. A complete listing of those measures that will now be a part of the annual institutional update is available in the Process Change document referenced above.

In addition to the quantitative ratios/indicators, there will also be seven document uploads: All Most Recent Audited Financial Statements, IPEDS Finance Survey Data, Title IV Compliance Audits, Catalog/URL, Most Recent USDE Composite Score, and if applicable the following; Bond Rating for New Debt issued, and Financial Audit from Parent Corporation. Mandatory data elements will be uploaded automatically from NCES IPEDS data sources by MSCHE staff to take off some burden to the institution. However, the institution will enter the optional data elements.

The mid-point review will be a peer-review of the last four-years of annual updates along with feedback from the Commission. Note the focus of the mid-point peer review will be opportunities or input for Institutional Improvement. Thus, in addition to the quantitative items for the AIU, there will also be a tracking/accounting of institutional mission, goals, objectives and some discussion on how we have met, exceed, or discussion of why we haven't met certain goals/objectives and/or if they have changed due to the changing environment at the institution. Note the whole focus of MSCHE accreditation is on institutional improvement. After the mid-point review there are the AIUs until the 8th year in which the institution will engage in self-study that will end with a peer-review on-site team visit. At this point, the self-study form and format will not change substantively other than it will be framed by the new 7 standards rather than the old 14 standards. Note though that the 7 standards really are just the old 14 re-framed into 7. Thus assessment of institutional effectiveness and student learning are built into each standard instead of being their own standards. The new process has a nice visual map (http://www.msche.org/documents/NewCycle.pdf) that shows the full 8 year process and even stems off when findings of non-compliance might be found and shows how those fit into the larger cycle. It is important for all at an institution to be aware of these changes and be knowledgeable about this important process for Holy Family University. With these changes the Commission is committed to being a resource for its member institutions and will develop a data portal where institutions will be able to benchmark their annual update data against peers in the region. This will be something new for the Commission and one that will be helpful for us to frame our reporting in context to other institutions in the middle states region.

Holy Family University will enter this new cycle in Spring 2017, responding to the new AIUs when the MSCHE portal opens. Our next full self-study report and visit will be in 2020-2021 as our PRR (five-year review) was done in 2016, thus we will stay on the old 10-year self-study cycle. After our self-study visit in 2021 we will be fully on-board with the new 8-year cycle.

The MSCHE Defined

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education is a voluntary, non-governmental, regional membership association currently serving higher education institutions in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and other geographic areas in which the Commission conducts accrediting activities.

Mission

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education assures students and the public of the educational quality of higher education. The Commission's accreditation process ensures institutional accountability, self-appraisal, improvement, and innovation through peer review and the rigorous application of standards within the context of institutional mission.

For more information about Middle States, go to http://www.msche.org/?Nav1=ABOUT&Nav2=MISSION .

Eye on Assessment

By Lisa D. Belfield, Ed.D.
Associate Director

A Q & A with Drs. Jennifer DeCicco and Jaclyn Myers, School of Arts and Sciences, highlighting the start of the assessment journey in the Neuroscience program.

What is the evolution of the Neuroscience major?
The Neuroscience major at Holy Family University is a new program that was revised and changed significantly from the Psychobiology program. The Neuroscience program was developed after significant review (internal and external) of the Psychobiology program. We changed a great deal about the major so that the two components (natural science and psychology) are balanced in the coursework. The changes to the curriculum, along with the change in the name of the major, have helped to bring the program up-to-date.

With these changes, students have the flexibility with restricted electives to pursue areas of interest in psychology, natural science, or a combination of both in their junior and senior years. Additionally, the restricted electives allow students the opportunity to customize the major such that they can attempt to fulfill prerequisite courses for graduate study (e.g. medical school). In allowing the major to be less prescriptive, it will likely encourage students to explore their interests and find their niche within the field.

What are the objectives for the Neuroscience program? What are the primary skills, knowledge, and content all students who graduate from the program should know, learn, and do?
We have developed an assessment plan with four objectives at this time. They include:

1. **Concepts:** Identify and describe the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings represented in the general content domains of psychology, biology and neuroscience.

2. **Methods:** Apply basic research methods in psychology, biology and neuroscience including research design, data analysis, interpretation, and scientific writing.

3. **Application:** Demonstrate an understanding of the interaction between social and biological factors that influence behavior and health.

4. **Integration:** Identify principles of neural science from molecular, mechanistic, biological systems, and bio-behavioral interactions.

What tools will be used to assess these competencies?
All objectives currently identified will be assessed through a comprehensive exam. Using a comprehensive exam to assess each objective will allow us to identify challenging areas within the

program and develop a plan for improvement. Once the program increases in enrollment we can begin to identify additional tools to assess the competencies identified; for example, the creation of an intermediate neuroscience course and/or a common assignment.

How will you use the data and information you collect to enhance student learning? What are your assessment plans for the future?
The results from the assessment of Objective #1 (Concepts) will be used to evaluate whether students have successfully grasped the ability to integrate concepts related to psychology, biology, and neuroscience with empirical articles. The results from the assessment of Objective #2 (Methods) will be used to evaluate whether students have successfully mastered concepts related to methodology. We hope to effectively evaluate this objective at multiple levels to facilitate strong foundation and understanding of research methods and scientific writing.

The results from the assessment of Objective #3 (Application) will be used to evaluate whether students have successfully mastered concepts demonstrating the interaction between psychological and biological factors influencing behavior and health. The results from the assessment of Objective #4 (Integration) will be used to evaluate whether students have successfully grasped the ability to identify principles of neural science from molecular, mechanistic, biological systems, and bio-behavioral interactions.

As with all assessment data, the aim is to enhance the learning opportunities of our students. The data will be reported in a meaningful way to spark dialogue within and across areas to strategically address opportunities for improvement. In addition to providing the evidence for meaningful dialogue, the information can also be used to build upon the program. We are currently discussing developing an integrated course between psychology and biology with a required lab; we would also like to add a neuroscience senior seminar course. As the program grows, we will continue to have an open dialogue about how the curriculum can be improved to reflect the current status of the field, as well as the needs of our students.

Assessment is an on-going process, in fact, it is a journey. Stay tuned for updates as we follow the new Neuroscience program through their assessment journey and highlight other academic programs and administrative units in upcoming editions. If your program or unit would like to share your assessment initiatives and how you are using results to improve, please contact lbelfield@holyfamily.edu.

Upcoming Event

Faculty Development Day
Holy Family University – Bensalem Campus
March 22, 2017

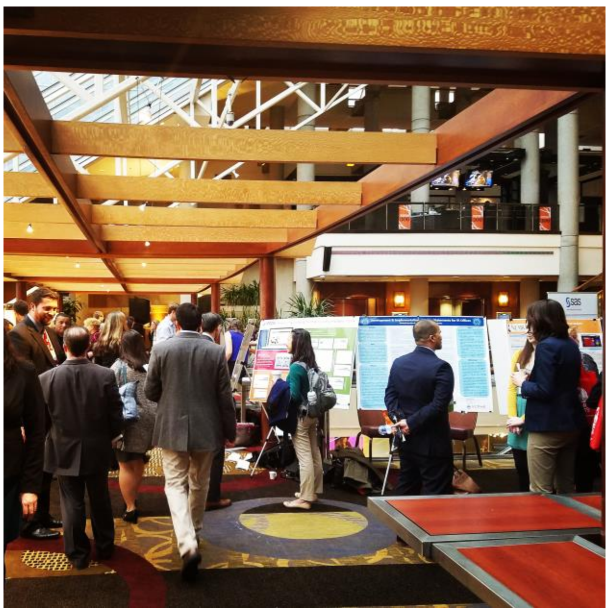
Dr. Lisa Belfield, Dr. Bernice Purcell, and Denise Hardiman will provide faculty with an overview of our newly acquired accountability/assessment management system – *Taskstream*. Whether you are just beginning your assessment journey, in the middle, or closing the loop, come find out how *Taskstream* will assist us in organizing, collecting, and analyzing assessment data in order to improve student learning and program quality.

Conference Reflection

By Lisa D. Belfield, Ed.D., Associate Director, OIRA

On November 12-15, 2016, the 43rd annual North East Association for Institutional Research (NEAIR) conference took place along the Inner Harbor in Baltimore Maryland. I was fortunate enough to have won the NEAIR Memorial Conference Grant which provided financial support towards registration and travel costs for the conference. My colleagues from OIRA, Chad May, who served as the conference chairperson, and Kymber Taylor were also in attendance.

This conference was packed with interesting workshops, sessions, and keynote speakers. The highlight of the conference for me was attending the pre-conference workshop, *Newcomers to Institutional Research*. The intimate setting before the start of the full conference allowed newcomers to network and dig a little deeper into the world of institutional research.



Snapshot of the poster session in the conference center

These are my ***Top 3 Insights*** garnered from the 2017 NEAIR Conference:

1. The role of institutional research is evolving. Driven by the regional accreditors, there is a greater emphasis on using evidence for continuous improvement of student learning and outcomes assessment. Institutional research plays a major role in institutional effectiveness, and here at Holy Family University we <u>all</u> play a major role in ensuring we, as a whole, achieve the goals and objectives of our institution. Many of the sessions were forward thinking, in that, while external reporting may be the traditional function of institutional research, new models and a renewed focus call for us to recognize the functional relation between the individual parts and the whole. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment is truly a university-wide office that serves as an advocate for data-informed decision making between all stakeholders in order to improve institutional effectiveness. Swing and Ross wrote an article for the March/April 2016 issue of *Change* magazine which speaks to the potential direction for institutional research: https://www.airweb.org/Resources/IRStudies/Pages/A-New-Vision-for-Institutional-Research.aspx

2. This may seem obvious, but we should lead by example. Presentations discussed specific examples of academic program assessment, but also assessment of the effectiveness of the institutional research office. This session was very timely as we work to assess the effectiveness of Holy Family's administrative and educational support units, including our own office. Assessment planning and terminology may be new concepts for many units, although many of them have been doing it for some time, just not documenting it or developing a specific action plan to use the data to improve. Questions we need to ask ourselves include: What does the unit mission look like in practice? How do we define effectiveness? How do we measure effectiveness? In the coming months, we plan to have every unit answer these questions, celebrate your achievements, but also strategize for improvement.

3. Dr. Michael W. Klein gave the plenary address and spoke on how data from institutional researchers can help higher education advocates improve the conversation with elected officials, other policymakers, and the public. One issue that makes institutional researchers cringe is the misunderstood and misperceived data behind statistics, such as graduation rates, graduates' salaries, and student debt. The question was asked, "What can we (as institutional research professionals) do to provide better data to the public (who are making college-going decisions based on these numbers), as well as policymakers? I was left thinking, and many colleagues expressed, that the core challenge is that data collected about students should represent the diversity of students, not just the first-time, full-time subset of students. Policymakers and the public need actionable, reliable information in order to make smart decisions about postsecondary education. You can read more about the importance of institutional researchers to policymaking here: https://njsecretaryhighereducation.com/2016/12/01/dec2016-guestcolumn/

And one more insight...

4. Lobster mac and cheese is my new favorite meal! Read more about that here: http://www.thamesstreetoysterhouse.com/

Although I am not new to higher education, assessment, Middle States, etc., this is my first appointment working in an institutional research office. This made the conference all the more exciting for me. When you listen with a beginner's mind, with curiosity, you can often connect seemingly old concepts with new possibilities.

Tips for Planning a Successful Survey Project

By Kymber L. Taylor, Research Analyst

With accreditation standards to meet and outcomes to assess, surveys have become a common tool in higher education that help us measure many things- they assess impact, gauge satisfaction, evaluate need, etc. And while we survey for many different reasons, the very best surveys, the ones that allow us to confidently make informed decisions, have a few things in common; they are easy to administer, they are easy to take, and they produce accurate data. And while it is not difficult to achieve these three outcomes (hey, survey design is not rocket science!), designing "good" surveys does require some thoughtful planning up front. The tips I share below are for that first, often overlooked, step in survey research- the planning phase.

Begin with the end in mind

I know, I know, you just have a brief survey and you only want to ask your students/faculty/ colleagues a few simple questions. But please, before you even THINK about writing down your survey questions, take some time to reflect on the specific objectives of the survey project.

Some questions to consider:

- What are you trying to figure out? And for what population?
- How will your team use the information?
- When the survey closes, what will you do with the data?
- What type of reports do you need?

In answering these questions, you not only are better able to clarify the objectives of your project, but you are also able to visualize the format of the data you are collecting. Maybe initially you just wanted to know if a student used your service, so you thought a simple yes or no question would be best. But after mulling over these questions and clarifying how you can use the data collected, you might find that what you really want to know is how often a service is used and by whom!

All the small things

So now that we know the exact objectives for your project, and we know the type of data you are seeking, we can look at the details and logistics of designing your project. (Don't rush; we are still not quite ready to write those questions!) Now, we know what we want to gather, we can look at how to gather the data you need.

Some questions to consider:

- Where else might I get this data?
- What is the best time for me to deploy the survey?
- Do I need to survey the whole population, or can I sample?
- What is the best method of administering the survey?

And especially for this part of your project, this is where we in Institutional Research can really help! We may already have some of the information you are seeking (or we might know where to get it), we can certainly help you time your project so that it does not conflict with other surveys, we can advise on a sampling strategy that best meets your needs, and we also know some clever tricks that will make administering your survey a piece of cake.

So the next time you are planning a survey, reach out to me or my colleagues in IR. Of course we can assist you with drafting your questionnaire and analyzing the data, but to really get every bit of insight out of your survey project, let us help with the planning and design phase of your project too!

The 2016-2017 University Fact Book is available in OIRA Internal Resources in Canvas. It contains data in the following four areas:

Section I. Fall Enrollment and Student Statistics
Section II: Undergraduate and Graduate Admissions
Section III. Academic Program Trends
Section IV. Organization (Faculty, Staff, and Finance Data)

If you have questions about the Fact Book please contact Cheryl Glover, cglover@holyfamily.edu.

Upcoming Conferences

Carnegie Foundation Summit on Improvement in Education
March 27-29, 2017
Chad L. May, attending

2017 marks the fourth annual Carnegie Foundation Summit on Improvement in Education. This three-day event draws more than a thousand of the best minds on the vanguard of improving education by applying innovative approaches to research and development carried out in networks to address real problems of practice.

Association of Institutional Research 57th Annual Forum
May 30 – June 2, 2017
Kymber Taylor, poster presentation
Lisa Belfield, attending

The Forum, the annual conference for the Association for Institutional Research, is the world's largest gathering of higher education professionals in institutional research, effectiveness, assessment, planning and related fields. The four-day event features more than 300 educational sessions and an Exhibit Hall showcasing the latest tools and services for these higher education fields