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To: John Schwenn, VP, Academic Affairs
Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee

Re: Moving from a Compliance Model to a Commitment Model of Assessment: Lessons from the HLC

Part One—What We Learned:

- Successful assessment involves shared responsibility instead of high degrees of autonomy.
- Our new assessment and program evaluation plan puts us in compliance and ahead of many programs. However, we should strive to develop a positive culture of assessment at ESU.
- HLC insists that student learning is a priority of administration, and this is evident in administrative involvement and strong support.
- Of the 25 institutions in attendance, all had administration present, except ESU. This facilitated more planning-level dialogue. Most teams left with a plan detailing roles and responsibilities at their institution.
- There must be clear linkage between assessment and improving student learning and the linkage should delineate an active role for the student in this process.
- Successful assessment plans have student learning as a major focus of the dialogue between the university and its constituents.
- Student learning cannot be separate from strategic planning or other strategies of institutional growth and development. It must be a core component of all aspects of the university long before the next HLC self-study.
- Assessment is critically important to the HLC, and many institutions are falling short. Seventy percent of institutions are revisited by HLC, and eighty percent of those revisits are due to assessment.
- Institutions should devote more of their assessment efforts to needs assessment. This will be especially important when HLC looks at institutions' recruiting and new program development (e.g., Considering international initiatives, are we assessing what the new student populations need or are we operating from a "colonial" model?).
- To best develop and improve, institutions should strive to identify "aspiration institutions" or programs rather than using peer institutions and programs when forming an assessment model or plan.
- Full-fledged assessment involves everyone on campus including non-academic units.

Part Two—Observations and Potential Applications to ESU:

- Developing a positive culture of assessment for us will require addressing some of the results of our current decentralized model. This model has contributed to a lack of information sharing, a lack of focus on core outcomes, and decreased motivation in some areas.
- ESU needs to strive to achieve greater shared responsibility for student learning, especially in general education and other core components of the academic program.
- In order to improve assessment of student learning on our campus, it needs expanded development from two directions: at both program and administrative levels.
- Fostering a culture of assessment should focus on helping departments and programs. The burden of assessment development is resting largely upon unremunerated faculty. Resources are needed to help faculty develop and use assessments, as well as support them in initiating and maintaining effective evaluation planning activities.
- To move from compliance to commitment, ESU should strive to create formative (not just summative) dialogue between administration and faculty and among academic areas.
- Ensuring student learning in new programs and major initiatives (e.g., international exchange initiatives) is a central theme that could be facilitated by assessment.

Part Three—Recommendations:

A. Short Term Strategies

We have identified the following strategies needed in the next academic year to foster a culture of assessment and to place greater focus on student learning as a core strategy.

1. Develop and define roles as related to assessment/program evaluation.
2. Create an interdisciplinary, faculty-peer assessment team at the college level.
3. Remunerate and/or provide recognition for assessment related activities (e.g., through annual faculty evaluation, through promotion and tenure evaluations, by providing release time, OOE support for assessment).

B. Long Term Strategies

Beyond the first year, we have identified these future activities as essential to continued development:

1. Develop a college-level structure for dialoging, information sharing, oversight, and review among departments and programs, rather than funneling year-end reports through the Assessment and Teaching Enhancement office.
2. Strive to make assessment of student learning a greater focal point of the strategic plan.
3. Consider assessment results before changes are implemented. For example, it might be wise to consider the creation of an International Advisory Committee (IAC) on campus to collect and analyze data about international education (e.g., needs assessment, learning environment differences, student learning).
4. Place greater focus on student learning in university marketing strategies. (e.g., make a point of illustrating assessment of student learning and the work of the faculty associated with it).