Dear Sue and Steve,

As I mentioned during the CAA meeting yesterday, Chapter 5 refers a number of times to the “Director of Program Review and Assessment,” a position that has not existed since July 2007. The multiple uses of the incorrect title throughout the chapter suggest to the Middle States reader a stable, continuing process, whereas clarifying that the administrative coordination of program review and assessment is dependent upon a temporary worker conveys quite a different reality.

Chapter 5

p. 4 and 17 describes the creation of the “Director of Program Review and Assessment” position, but does not explain that the line no longer exists.

   Suggested change: explain that the permanent position was replaced in 2007 with an Interim appointment on a temporary line

Feedback addressed as follows:

   • Follow the CAA suggestion (provided below) and note that the position of Director of Program Review and Assessment has been filled since July 2007 on an interim basis.

p. 5 (2 times), p. 10, p. 17, p. 19, p. 21, p. 22 (3 times) p. 24 the title “Director of Program Review and Assessment” is used

   Suggested change: since the text describes recent and ongoing activities carried out by the Interim Director, there should be a clarification of title throughout the chapter i.e. The Interim Director….

Feedback addressed as follows:

   • Instances of noting this position on page 5 refer to the functions of the position, throughout the self-study period, no change suggested.

   • Note on page 10 that “the position of Director of Program Review and Assessment has been filled since July 2007 on an interim basis.”

   • Page 17: change to “As noted earlier, the position of Director of Program Review and Assessment was created in 2002.” Strike the part about “within IRPE” as the position was initially established ½ in Undergraduate Ed, ½ in CETL, but reported to the Dean of Undergrad Ed, but was then moved to IRPE in 2006. The notation of Dir Prog Rev and Assess on page 17 focuses on the position, not the person, as the Practitioners Guide was developed by the then Dir of Prog Review and Assess on behalf of the university – the Univ did not do it. Then later
notes that the “current Interim Dir of Prog Review and Assess provides support to all academic units, tracks assessment activities…

- Pages 19, 21, 22, and 24: added “Interim to title” as suggested and where it seemed appropriate.

**Additional notes:**

**Chapter 5**

**p. 19 states that the Assessment Seminars have been held annually since 2006**

*Suggested change:* a correction that there were Assessment Seminars in 2005, 2008, and 2009.

**Feedback addressed as follows:**

- **Changed.**

**p. 8 states that “Divisional and departmental assessment plans and activity reports are forwarded or made available to appropriate Senate councils...”**

*Suggested change:* Since this section is addressing academic assessment I am not sure what this refers to. There are no divisional or departmental academic assessment plans that I’m aware of that are made available to Senate Councils, unless done so directly by department Chairs or Deans. I recommend a clarification since the description may suggest to faculty that their Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Activity Reports (which are reviewed by the CAA, and are program based plans rather than departmental or divisional) are shared more widely that they’ve been told.

**Feedback addressed as follows:**

- Changed to reflect the fact that departmental assessment plans are reviewed by the program review committee of the CAA, which provides feedback to them.

---

Sue, Bruce and Steve:

I’ve made some recommendations for change to the assessment info outlined in Ch 5. I believe the attached better represents what is happening in student success regarding assessment and the activities that have been going on for the better part of the decade.

The pages where the changes should be made are included.

Thanks

Chris

Christine A. Bouchard
Vice President for Student Success
UNH 206
University at Albany

*Bps: underlined text denotes added text, strike through: suggestions for deletion.*
The IAP document originally guided each vice president to develop an assessment plan that describes how his/her division supports and measures the achievement of divisional and institutional goals. Divisional, academic unit, and administrative assessment plans and annual activity reports would be shared with or made available to various campus constituencies to promote collegial review of assessment processes and promote community awareness of assessment efforts. President Kermit Hall complemented IAP provisions for academic and administrative unit assessment plans with the Compact Planning process, which focused on selective investment proposals. Academic unit assessment plans now exist in virtually every academic department and program, owing to requirements for developing them as part of the University’s cyclic program review process, but the development and implementation of administrative unit assessment plans have lagged considerably, with the exception of units in the Division of Student Success where assessment plans and annual reports have been compiled for the better part of the last decade.

Administrative Department Assessments

As mentioned above, the University used the Compact Planning process for a short time (2005-2007). Each academic and administrative unit submitted a detailed report that included its mission and function, goals and objectives, proposed initiatives, and an assessment plan for each initiative. The Selective Investment Committee reviewed all Compact Plans and prioritized them, then budget and resource allocations were made to the units determined to have the highest priority initiatives related to the overall University mission and goals. The Compact Planning process was initially intended to be an ongoing process that would align University goals and strategies.

Even though the Compact Planning process was not formally continued on campus, some administrative units found the process beneficial to their operations and have continued similar efforts on their own by routinely looking at their goals and objectives and considering new initiatives to help further those goals, as well as the overall University goals. Most notably, the units within the Division of Student Success have continued a formal assessment process, with each unit completing an annual report of its assessment activities and results as they relate to the unit’s mission and goals. The division has created a Student Success Assessment Committee, which serves as an internal resource for the subunits as they develop assessment plans and reports. It also advises the Vice President for Student Success. There are also two subcommittees, the Assessment Planning Subcommittee, which reviews unit assessment plans and reports, and the Assessment Report Subcommittee, which reviews executive summaries and reports concerning divisional assessment activities.

Many of the administrative units at the University at Albany, with the exception of the Division of Student Success, do not have formal assessment plans in place to evaluate their performance and goals achievement. That does not mean, however, that there are not informal assessment activities in place. In order to evaluate the quality of assessment activities in the administrative departments, two divisions that include solely administrative units were chosen for more in-depth review. Some of the units within each division are student service offices, while others have little or no student contact. The divisions chosen were the Division of Finance and Business and the Division of Student Success. As in the
review of academic program assessments, the adequacy of the assessments in place, and not the quality of the offices, was evaluated.

The assessments of the units in these divisions that are not part of academic programs appear to require individualized sets of domains and criteria. Formal, written, regular assessments of these units are difficult to obtain, but most units suggested intuitively appealing measures that they employed formally. For example, ongoing Finance and Business activities help ensure that the units meet aspects of their missions in fiscally responsible ways. In a sense, external audits by both independent accounting firms, federal and state agencies, and SUNY for many of the units (State Accounting, Sponsored Funds Financial Management, Purchasing and Contracts, Equipment Management, Human Resources, and the Student Loan Services Center) serve as a form of assessment for Finance and Business. Another example is customer satisfaction surveys conducted by Parking and Mass Transit as well as Facilities Management. The campus also has a state-mandated internal control program that provides periodic reviews of each unit’s missions, goals, policies, procedures, and operations. The reviews are performed jointly by the campus’ Assistant Internal Control Coordinator, Associate Counsel, and Information Security Officer. While these reviews and testing are not as structured or detailed as the assessments of academic programs, they do help provide another view of the operations of each unit on campus.

The units within the Division of Student Success have a number of formal assessment processes that are more consistent with those sought by academic units and the University’s IAP. These various assessment processes include each unit submitting an annual report of its activities each year, creating a three-year assessment plan that outlines the various assessment activities to be undertaken in a given year, maintaining assessment dashboards or key performance indicators as well as developing and updating during the course of the year a series of strategic priorities. All assessment activities relate to the unit’s mission and goals. Additionally, each unit has a designated assessment coordinator charged with overseeing assessment activities in their unit.

At the divisional level, there is a Student Success Assessment Council, which serves as an internal resource for the subunits as they develop assessment plans and reports. It also advises the Vice President for Student Success. There are also two subcommittees, the Assessment Planning Subcommittee, which reviews unit assessment plans and reports, and the Assessment Report Subcommittee, which reviews executive summaries and reports concerning divisional assessment activities. Additionally, the Division maintains an extensive assessment web site (www.albany.edu/studentaffairs/assessment) which also includes the annual briefing book that features data from each of the Division’s 13 units. The Vice President’s Office also maintains a five year Division-wide assessment plan and oversees unit self-studies each summer. Most recently, the Division partnered with StudentVoice, a national student affairs assessment organization, to further facilitate the assessment of programs and services Division-wide.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- Suggestions incorporated.
TO: Sue Faerman, Co-Chair, MSCHE Self-Study Steering Committee  
Steve Messner, Co-Chair, MSCHE Self-Study Steering Committee  
Bruce Szelest, Director, Institutional Research  
FROM: Laurence Kranich, Chair, Graduate Academic Council  
DATE: December 1, 2009  
RE: MSCHE Self-Study

GAC was asked to review the relevant portions of the MSCHE Self-Study (Chapters 5, 6 and 9). I include our chapter-by-chapter comments below. These contain both evaluative comments as well as some but not all line-by-line edits.

Chapter 5.

There was some concern that this chapter is excessively verbose. One suggestion was that since the self-study is intended to be reflective and ultimately to provide an opportunity to identify areas for improvement, there is no reason to include the entire history of the University’s assessment process. Rather, it would suffice to describe the procedures currently in place.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- No change made. The history of assessment process is important to convey, as was developed over the self-study period, and is a major focus of Middle States.

Other than recognizing the lack of adequate assessment processes for administrative units, there is little critique of the institutional assessment processes themselves and recommendations for their improvement – as opposed to suggestions for improved outcomes such as on p.14. For example, on p.10, there are several references to “improved assessment activities” yet there is no discussion of their past or present shortcomings nor of objective measures of successful assessment – although p.14 refers to the articulation of “a process for continued direct and indirect assessments of student learning” with an emphasis on “quantitative as well as qualitative methods of assessments” without specifying any such methods.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- No change made. The discussion on page 10 carries over from page 9, and focuses on assessment as related to compact planning. The point being made was that administrative assessments are not being systematically carried out, not that they are necessarily deficient in some regard.

There are numerous value judgments in the text which lack meaningful content. For example:
“Underlying this approach is the belief that ‘good assessment is good research’…. (p.2)

“It is clear that the University believes strongly that assessment activities promote operational effectiveness and efficiency across the University.” (p.5)

“It appears that the University has made important progress in developing a campus culture of assessment as well as a foundation from which future teaching and learning improvements will emerge.” (p.5)

“…great progress has been made in the past five years … to modify the culture in such a way that assessment becomes a critical facet in decision making.” (p.9)

Feedback addressed as follows:

- Changes made to a few of these, as well as some other changes consistent with the idea that these are the views of the subcommittee, as based on its analyses of the evidence.

The only explicit reference to UAC’s and GAC’s roles in the assessment process states, “In addition, major programs are subject to approval and review by the Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Councils of the University Senate, SUNY Central Administration, and the State Education Department” (p. 5). Also, on p.8 the report states, “Divisional and departmental assessment plans and activity reports are forwarded or made available to appropriate Senate councils in order to keep the University community fully apprised of the campus assessment process, and to provide opportunities for sharing of best practices, and collegial review of assessment practices.” However, this understates, and possibly misconstrues, the role of the Senate councils. In particular, the purpose of forwarding academic assessment plans to UAC and GAC is not simply to inform those bodies. Rather, according to the Charter of the University Senate, Sections X.3.5 and X.4.5, respectively, those are the bodies charged with reviewing all assessment reports pertaining to programs in their respective domains and recommending changes they deem desirable, including the possible suspension or discontinuance of such programs. This omission is particularly glaring on pp.12-15 in discussing “Academic Program Assessments.” The impression there is that CAA is charged with program evaluation. However, while the Charter states that CAA “shall review the actions and assessment reports of its committees and shall be responsible for formally recommending that an assessment report be accepted by the University Senate” (Section X.6.5), it is not the role of CAA to formulate recommendations for program changes on the basis of the assessment reports, as suggested on pp.10 and 12 (although it is within its scope to “make recommendations to administrators and academic units for the improvement of the process” (p.11, emphasis added)). Similarly, twice on p.11 the report refers to CAA or its Program Review Committee providing timely or constructive feedback to academic units and deans, again blurring the line between the assessment process and the outcome.

Feedback addressed as follows:
• The “blurring” noted was not self-evident to the subcommittee that authored this section and they were a little reluctant to try to make changes over something they did not fully understand. Page 10 doesn’t reference CAA. Pages 12-15 now have some changes that attempt to clarify that the CAA only examines the process and how well folks stick to the process, if that helps.

The discussion on pages 8 and 10 suggests that, as a result of leadership changes, PAAC “stopped meeting in 2005” prior to accomplishing its mission. However, it is not clear that PAAC was intended to be ongoing or involved in conducting assessments, unlike CAA.

Feedback addressed as follows:
• Changed to say the PAAC stopped meeting in 2005, after the IAP was adopted.

The discussion on pp.13-14 describes the ratings of the domains of the assessment plan rubrics of 16 selected academic units. The report states that two independent raters reviewed each assessment plan. That being the case, most respondents were rating different plans. Therefore, it is unclear what sense to make of aggregating responses. Also, were respondents rating the plans themselves or their execution?

Feedback addressed as follows:
• No change. Yes, raters were rating different plans, and the aggregation is a summary of how the plans, taken together, were viewed on the evaluation rubrics (sampling and a division of labor were used), not how one or a few plans were evaluated by multiple reviewers. The evaluation was of the plans, not their execution, as is explained in the text.

It would be useful to incorporate other instruments—SIRF’s, SOS—into the larger discussion.

Feedback addressed as follows:
• These are discussed later in the chapter, as noted by the CAA comments.

Tables 5.3 and 5.4 are included both in the text and again in the appendix (although the latter is labeled 5.5 in the appendix). The text on pp.22-23 refers to “Table 5.5” without indicating that it is located in the appendix. However, the description clearly pertains to Table 5.6 on p.49.

Feedback addressed as follows:
• Done

Given that much of the assessment process is migrating to the web, there might be some discussion of this process and the anticipated consequence.

Feedback addressed as follows:
• Not sure what this means, so cannot address.

The recommendations are generally useful and worthwhile. The items in the list include identifiable and verifiable actions but generally lack plans and timetables for implementation.

Feedback addressed as follows:
• No change. It is not for the self-study to issue timetables regarding the implementation of any recommendations it may make, nor to even insist they be adopted – only to raise them.

Other comments:
The first three paragraphs under “Compact Planning Initiative” on p.6 and p.9 are identical.

Feedback addressed as follows:
• Fixed.

Dear Sue, Bruce and Steve,

The Council on Academic Assessment has completed its review of relevant chapters of the draft Middle States report. Our comments are attached. I invite you to be in touch if you have any questions.

Best,

Heidi

Heidi L. Andrade, Ed.D.
TO: Sue Faerman, Co-Chair, MSCHE Self-Study Steering Committee
    Steve Messner, Co-Chair, MSCHE Self-Study Steering Committee
    Bruce Szelest, Director, Institutional Research
FROM: The Council on Academic Assessment
DATE: December 7, 2009
RE: MSCHE Self-Study
The CAA was asked to review chapters 5, 9 and 10 of the draft MSCHE Self-Study. We decided that individual Council members would post fine-grained, text-level suggestions for revision to the report on the website; broad stroke comments are summarized below.

Chapter 5

What we valued:
- The candidness of much of this chapter was impressive.
- We are sympathetic to the comment about stabilizing the membership of the CAA.
- The incorporation of instruments such as SIRFs and SOS into the larger discussion is useful.

Concerns and recommendations for revision:
- The role of GAC in assessment should be clarified. “In addition, major programs are subject to approval and review by the Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Councils of the University Senate, SUNY Central Administration, and the State Education Department” (p. 5): Perhaps the statement simply means that GAC plays a role in the review of programs when they are initially proposed—not during periodic assessment.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- Changed to mention that they’re approved by GAC
- The first three paragraphs of the discussion of the Compact Planning Initiative (pp. 6 and 9) are redundant.
- These two sections actually make different points and specify different groups. The modest overlap emphasizes the ubiquity of assessment.

Page 4 read: On the academic side of the house, the IAP, as noted above, incorporates existing frameworks for assessment of majors, as prescribed in the program review process by the CAA, and for assessment of the general education program, as specified in the General Education Assessment Plan (GEAP), which the General Education Committee of the Undergraduate Academic Council developed and which the SUNY General Education and Assessment Review (GEAR) group approved. These two formal processes are contained in their entirety within the campus-wide plan and the University has faithfully executed them via the submission of annual school/college assessment reports in 2006 and 2007. Academic units perform assessments; however,
they do so with varying degrees of rigor, as demonstrated in a review of assessment plans (see the Part I, Academic Program Assessments section below).

The CAA, constituted in 2004 under a revision to the faculty bylaws, oversees both assessments of academic programs (undergraduate and graduate) and the campus’s cyclical review of its general education program, which each year assesses two to three of the fourteen student learning categories, on a rolling basis. Additionally, the President and Provost through IRPE sponsor assessment workshops and seminars on-campus. (The most recent assessment workshop occurred in October 2008 and highlighted best practices in academic assessment by select units.) IRPE is organizing a workshop for February 2009; this workshop is for administrative unit assessment. Worth noting is that in 2006 the University Senate reassigned the General Education Assessment Subcommittee (GEAS) from the Undergraduate Academic Council’s (UAC) General Education Committee, which has primary oversight of the University’s general education program, to a committee (the General Education Assessment Committee) of the CAA. It was felt that the assessment of the general education program should not reside with the committee charged with program oversight, but instead with the CAA.

***Page 9 reads:

In the subcommittee’s opinion, the University has made important progress in developing a campus culture of assessment as well as a foundation from which future teaching and learning improvements will emerge. The University aligns the SUNY Assessment in the Major initiative with external accreditation through national associations where such external reviews exist. Furthermore, where assessments are administered institutionally, they are complemented with a wide array of evaluations and peer reviews carried out at the departmental level. In addition, major programs are subject to approval by the Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Councils of the University Senate, SUNY Central Administration, and the State Education Department. Many of the institution’s professional programs are regularly reviewed for accreditation purposes.

As a result, the quality of Albany’s educational programs is assessed in many complementary ways, by both internal and external peers, editors, reviewers, funding institutions, budget panels, and accrediting agencies. In this context, student grades, self-reported assessments, faculty teaching evaluations, periodic program reviews, alumni studies, and assessment information about student attainment in the major all constitute complementary ways of obtaining useful feedback in order to improve learning.

Feedback addressed as follows:

- These are different points.

- The chapter should note that the position of Director of Program Review and Assessment has been filled since July 2007 on an interim basis.

Feedback addressed as follows:

- Done.
With reference to the discussion of PAAC, it seems like an error to state that “the Committee stopped meeting in 2005” (p. 10) and to imply that this was a direct result of administrative transitions. While the recommendation to reconvene PAAC might be a good one, it seems that by 2005 the group had accomplished its task.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- The point about the PAAC remains, as there are areas of that have not accomplished much in terms of assessment. The “2005” was dropped.

- The phrase “To keep ratings reliable” (p. 13) should be removed, as it implies a misconception about reliability. The next sentence about reliability should stay.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- Eliminated “to keep ratings reliable”

- Although there are references (pp. 13-14) to assessment plans that exceed 100 pages, we cannot recall seeing assessment plans longer than a few pages.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- Some included vitae, so dropped the specific number.

In general, we would like to see more critique of the kinds of assessment recommended in the plans and of the lack of evidence that effective assessment has actually been carried out. For example, the findings regarding the quality of assessment plans reported on p. 14 (e.g., 87% of the assessment plans received a rating of excellent) paints a rosy picture. At a minimum, we recommend inserting a statement about the need to differentiate between creating a plan and actually executing one. Even better would be a brief discussion of the need to help departments learn to close the loop and ensure feedback of the results of assessment into improvements in their programs. One such statement on page 18 is a start: “review of annual assessment activity reports revealed a lack of clarity in how faculty use the assessment results”. The chapter could achieve much greater utility if it were to articulate specific ways in which assessment data can be acted upon in order to drive program improvement.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- The subcommittee has added a bit to page 11 (depending on what draft one looks at), and noted in particular that “A review of annual assessment activity reports revealed a lack of clarity in how faculty use the assessment results. The distinction between drafting a plan and actually executing it is also key; it is unclear how consistently these assessments turn into concrete change. This finding suggests that assessment planning at UAlbany could lead to more subsequent changes in programs. Therefore, the University should continue to educate faculty about the
programmatic benefits of assessment, and encourage new ideas on how to improve the assessment planning process.”

- The fact that the recommendations are separated from the body of the chapter makes it difficult to trace those recommendations back to the problems they are intended to address. We suggest incorporating the recommendations into the text of the chapter, and summarizing them at the end.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- Recommendations are within the text of the chapter, but they could perhaps be highlighted better. Time permitting, will attend to this.

From Marjorie Pryse
Chapter 5—
Overall, the chapter has to be vague because it addresses assessment across a broad range of units and programs, but I would have liked to see more critique of the kinds of assessment recommended in the plans and the lack of evidence that assessment has been accomplished.

With reference to the role of GAC in assessment—“In addition, major programs are subject to approval and review by the Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Councils of the University Senate, SUNY Central Administration, and the State Education Department” (p. 5)—I don’t see any other description of GAC’s role. Perhaps ideally it should have a role—but then CAA doesn’t actually “review” programs either. Perhaps the statement simply means that GAC plays a role in the review of programs when they are initially proposed—not during periodic assessment.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- This is fixed.

With reference to the discussion of PAAC on page 10, it was my understanding that the group had accomplished its task. It seems like an error to state that “the Committee stopped meeting in 2005” and to imply that this was a direct result of administrative transitions. While the recommendation to reconvene PAAC might be a good one, this was not a committee that engaged in the nitty-gritty, as does CAA, so I’m not certain that it would necessarily improve the integration of assessment processes across administrative units. Still, this seems like a pretty strong recommendation from the chapter, so one worth considering.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- See above response to CAA comment on this – taken care of.
I’m sympathetic to comment about stabilizing CAA’s membership. For 2009-10, it appears that we actually have a great deal of continuity in the membership—perhaps for the first time. This might explain why CAA is working so well this year (worked pretty well last year too).

Pages 13-14: The assessment plans in some cases exceed 100 pages? Should the document really state that the Self-Study sometimes exceeds 100 pages? I don’t think we’ve ever seen an assessment plan longer than a few pages.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- Changed this.

P. 14—The assessment plan domain received the highest number of excellent ratings (87%)? Perhaps the MS Committee didn’t differentiate between creating a plan and actually executing one…as we’ve discussed in CAA. “The few that needed improvement”? (14). This doesn’t correlate with what we’ve discussed in CAA.

Feedback addressed as follows:
- This is how the data the subcommittee worked with turned out. The difference between creating a plan and executing it is now noted in the chapter, if that helps.

Useful incorporation of other instruments—SIRF’s, SOS—into the larger discussion.

The form on pp. 32ff—looks useful, but outside of the professional schools mandated to be detailed by accrediting agencies, have we ever seen a program include this much detail in their assessment plan? I realize the form is used for Gen Ed assessment—but it might be useful for program assessments as well.