

North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Institutions
of Higher Education

30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504
312/263-0456; 800/621-7440
FAX: 312/263-7462; Internet: Info@ncacihe.org

STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: September 14, 1998
STAFF: Cecilia L. López, Ph.D., Associate Director

INSTITUTION: Augustana College, Rock Island, IL

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Dr. Thomas Tredway, President

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION RE: REPORT: a report due on 6/1/98 focused on student academic achievement

ITEMS ADDRESSED IN REPORT: The Commission received on 6/1/98 a report entitled "Assessment at Augustana College: A report to the North Central Association, May, 1998."

STAFF ANALYSIS: The institution's report was shared with the team chair of the January 22-24, 1996, comprehensive visit for an additional perspective. His written response has been incorporated into this analysis.

The 1995-96 comprehensive Team recommended that the College strengthen the implementation of its assessment plan by (a) clarifying the role of the Assessment Review Committee, (2) determining the domains in which student learning across the general education curriculum may be assessed, and (3) instituting a mechanism which ensures that all departments will assess student learning across the major and that will ensure that departments are implementing changes as a result of their assessment strategies.

1. The Assessment Review Committee (ARC)

The College did not clarify the role of the ARC. It has also not been responsive to a second related concern raised by the Team. The Team cautioned the ARC not to accept "department plans that rely on students' course evaluations, instructors' assessment of student work in conjunction with grading, or satisfaction surveys of students... (p. 29, Team Report). It appears that the ARC has encountered difficulty in getting some departments to develop acceptable assessment measures since a number of departments failed to report the use of any direct measures of student learning and instead reported the use of measures that are indirectly related to the assessment of

student learning (e.g., analysis of enrollment patterns; grades and transcripts of grades; program review; a heavy reliance on survey data).

2. General Education

The College is making excellent progress in the development and implementation of its assessment program for general education. The College has determined the domains by which student learning across the general education program will be assessed. It has also introduced five strategies to measure student learning across the general education program: (1) 1997 and 1998 analyses of Transcripts and Syllabi; (2) 1998 pilot of the ACT COMP; (3) 1997 and 1998 analyses of Senior Projects; (4) 1997 and 1998 analyses of the Senior Survey; and (5) the 1995 and 1998 analyses of the Alumni Survey. Both the COMP and senior projects/capstone experiences are direct measures of student learning.

The College states that the COMP's subscales "do not directly match with all of our general education outcomes..." (p. 5). The College is encouraged to consider using a standardized or locally constructed measure in addition to the COMP that will directly match each of its stated outcomes for student learning across its general education program.

The College understands that a sample of 36 (9%) graduating seniors is neither representative nor a large enough sample upon which to make curricular changes. The College is therefore encouraged to acquire a more representative sample and larger sample size than it used in its pilot project for both the ACT and the analyses of Senior Projects. The College is also urged to determine the inter-rater reliability of any measure that requires faculty scoring and to consider providing the faculty with professional development/workshops on developing credible protocols for portfolio review and on the using scoring rubrics and rating scales.

The College is commended on the quality and thoughtfulness of the questions that data from its assessment of student learning across the general education curriculum have generated. While the answers to these questions may well raise others, their existence demonstrates how seriously the College is taking the importance of assessing student learning across its general education program.

3. Major

Some progress has been made toward institution-wide assessment of student learning across the major, but much remains to be done. Although the College states that over 75% of the departments are carrying out their assessment plans, the matrix provided (pp. 16-50) revealed that 18 of 28 departments did not report obtaining any results and 20 of 28 departments did not report recommending or making modifications to the curriculum, pedagogy, etc. as a result of assessment data. Additionally, 6 of 28 departments do not list measurable objectives focused on student learning, and despite

the Team's caution against the use of grades and self-report data (PP. 29-30, Team Report), 9 departments report using in-class assignments and/or grades as a method of assessing student learning across the major. This is troubling.

Another concern is that 7 of the 34 programs in which students may major do not yet have an assessment plan in place. Both the administration and faculty governance system should take immediate steps to ensure that these remaining programs are provided with the guidance and assistance they may need to ensure that academic program and institutional mission and purpose statements regarding student learning are being met or exceeded.

The work of a few departments appears exemplary. Worthy of note are those departments that are developing a "culture of evidence" by: (1) developing explicitly stated and measurable objectives for student learning; (2) using multiple measures that are aligned with the major's stated objectives and that cover the cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains; and (3) reporting results and program modifications based on such credible strategies as systematically assessing a sample of student work against published objectives by external reviewers.

In summary, the College has demonstrated excellent progress in the assessment of student learning for the general education program and for a few departments. It is not clear what individual or committee has the responsibility of assuring that departmental assessment plans are developed and implemented, that useful data are obtained, and that recommendations based on those data are linked with departmental plans and budgets. However, because of the substantial work that has been accomplished and documented, both staff and the Team Chair are confident that the College will continue to strengthen its efforts to provide for the assessment of student learning across all of its majors and programs.

STAFF ACTION: Accept the report focused on student academic achievement. No further reports are required. The College's next comprehensive evaluation is scheduled for 2005-06.