Successful Response To Monitoring Report

On 13 January 2014, Dr. Belle Wheelan, SACSCOC President, confirmed that Thomas Nelson is no longer being monitored on Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 (Institutional Effectiveness: Educational Programs).

Team Effort

This positive response from SACSCOC is a reflection of the hard work and dedicated efforts provided by the program faculty at Thomas Nelson. Our response—outlining the efforts of programs during the 2013-14 academic year, coupled with our current and future assessment plans—provided the justification to satisfy the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. A sincere thank you to those who have worked so hard in making this a successful team effort!

Continued and Focused Process

As Dr. Dever noted to the Thomas Nelson community, we must not rest on our laurels, “we now turn our attention to continuing with implementing the comprehensive plan we have laid out for ongoing assessment and improvement.” We still have much to accomplish in the area of assessment, an area in which we must continue to demonstrate consistent application and success for years to come.

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Spring 2014 Assessment Plan

Following the College-wide goal and institutional priority, as defined by the President, Thomas Nelson will complete a "full cycle of program-level assessment… [to] include clear articulation of the learning outcomes, methods for assessing those outcomes…, targets for student achievements…, actual results from the assessments, and a formal action plan which include analysis of the assessment results," coupled with a discussion of proposed changes based on analysis.

In order to make this happen, the IRE Office, in conjunction with program heads, developed the Program Assessment Timeline for 2013-14. This timeline structured the assessment process for the current academic year, including deadlines for assessment reports and 2014-15 assessment plans.

Spring Deadlines

- 15 Feb—Programs that collected assessment measures from the fall will complete a full review of those artifacts
- 24 March—All programs will have preliminary assessment results for one or more of their outcomes
- 18 April—All programs will have analyzed results for at least one PLO, determined next steps for improvement, and entered draft information into WEAVE
- 25 April—All programs will have entered preliminary assessment plans for academic year 2014-15 into WEAVE.
- 16 May—Final drafts of 2013-14 assessment cycle information and 2014-15 plans due in WEAVE.

Include Online Course Assessment Results

In an effort to ensure our online students are held to comparable rigor, please be sure to include results from online sections that have artifacts being pulled for program-level assessment efforts. This will have to be a major focus as we move into the next academic year; the efforts put forth this year will help address the SACSCOC Policy Statement on Distance and Correspondence Education.

Gen Ed Plan

This Spring, Thomas Nelson will participate in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. This survey, last implemented in 2007, will provide the College with much needed data on student services, student success, and the achievement of specific Gen Ed Core Competencies. More information on CCSSE at: http://www.ccsse.org/.

The College will also assess students planning to graduate this semester in the areas of Critical Thinking and Scientific Reasoning. The potential graduate pool will be split into two groups, with one half completing the critical thinking and the second half completing the scientific reasoning.

Full details of the College Gen Ed Plan can be found on the Assessment Webpage.
Future Assessment Cycles

In order to be able to respond to SACSCOC Principle 3.3.1.1, Thomas Nelson has committed to a full cycle of assessment to be completed within the 2013-14 academic year. This task means that assessment of at least one PLO and analyzing the results of the assessment must be completed prior to the close of the Spring semester. Also, programs must complete an assessment plan for the following academic year prior to the close of the Spring semester.

For future academic years (2014-15 and forward), programs will analyze results from a prior academic year in the subsequent fall semester; while assessment plans for future academic years will still be completed in the spring semester. For example, in Fall 2015, Programs will analyze assessment results from AY 2014-15 and create action plans based on those results. Assessment plans for AY 2015-16 will be developed in Spring 2015.

Training Opportunities

On 7-8 January 2014, Thomas Nelson faculty had the opportunity to attend four separate training sessions designed by the faculty, in conjunction with the IRE office, on assessment.

Faculty were able to engage with Dr. Robin Anderson, from JMU, concerning closing the loop on assessment, and a faculty panel that completed a full cycle of assessment over the previous academic year. Two other sessions, on Gen Ed and alignment, enhanced opportunities for faculty to enrich their assessment knowledge and skills.

A sincere thank you to those presenters that made the sessions possible: Dr. Robin Anderson, Dr. Christy Hawkins, Dawn Hayden, Elena Kuchina, Riham Mahfouz, Tom Pringle, and Cece (Elizabeth) Wheeler.

Upcoming and Future Training

IRE will develop a Spring WEAVE refresher, coupled with a discussion on analyzing assessment results and using those results to determine action plans and future cycles.

A group of three faculty will attend the WEAVE Connections Conference—focusing on Closing the Loop—this March at Virginia Tech.

Please know that IRE is on the lookout for future in-house training and assessment conferences that will help build our culture of assessment at Thomas Nelson. These opportunities are excellent ways to build professional development.
Lessons Learned at SACSCOC Conference

On 7-10 December 2013, the Thomas Nelson SACSCOC Leadership Team visited the SACSCOC Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. Here are important items that were gleaned from the conference in the area of assessment:

General Items

- Program faculty must demonstrate engagement in program assessment (this includes engaging full-time, adjuncts, community partners, and advisory boards, if applicable).
- Programs must demonstrate that an established program assessment plan is in place with at least one full assessment cycle completed, coupled with at least 2-3 years of assessment data.
- Transfer programs should be coordinating with faculty at local transfer institutions to articulate program learning outcomes.

Program Learning Outcomes

- Programs must (1) present a pattern of engagement and improvement over time, and (2) maintain consistent learning outcomes for systematic implementation in order to demonstrate improvement.
- Student learning outcomes (specifically PLOs) specify meaningful, reasonable, and attainable aspects of expected student learning.

Assessment Measures and Targets

- Assessment data are analyzed to establish comparability of distance programs and off-site instructional locations to campus-based programs. (Reference: “Distance and Correspondence Education” Policy Statement from SACSCOC)
- Programs must (1) identify data collection instruments or tools, (2) describe how data was implemented and collected, (3) and ensure assessment methodology is outlined. Additionally, (4) the use of multiple assessment measures/instruments demonstrate rigor.

Assessment Findings

- Assessments, findings, analyzed results, action plans, next steps, and tracking must demonstrate alignment. Furthermore, assessment results are disaggregated and directly aligned with specific outcomes.
- Programs demonstrate how assessment findings influence, inform, and/or guide program planning and decision making by explicitly linking specific assessment findings to concrete improvement plans and actions. Evidence of implementation of planned improvements must also be articulated.

Action Plans/Closing the Loop

- All supporting evidence must (1) be deliberately organized to substantiate a claim of compliance, (2) be shaped through reflection and interpretation, and (3) demonstrate a pattern of evidence with multiple indicators and a unifying theme.
- Action plans must (1) describe and document how assessment results are analyzed and used for improvement; additionally, the action plan must (2) be coupled with rationale as to why the action(s) was appropriate. Also, (3) identify priority improvement areas in action plans, coupled with a discussion of why the areas are priorities and specify how they will be addressed.
- Programs must demonstrate how program assessment cycles are informed by findings from previous assessment cycles and inform subsequent assessment planning.