

University Assessment Steering Council
January 27, 2017
Minutes

Present: Drs. Debbie Pace, Christina Sinclair, Courtney Wooten, Louise Stoehr, Todd Brown, Hans Williams; Ms. Joann Black

Dr. Pace opened the meeting at 2:30 by introducing Ms. Joann Black, Assistant to the Dean in the College of Sciences and Mathematics, who will be taking minutes of council meetings.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes from the December 13, 2016, meeting were approved and will be posted on the UASC website.

General Updates:

- UASC website: Dr. Pace confirmed that Mr. Joe Strahl, James I. Perkins College of Education, will continue to maintain the UASC website.
- Assessment Software Presentations: Presentations on several types of assessment software have been scheduled by the OSLIA for dates in January and February listed below and members of the UASC who are available have been invited to attend.
 - January 10th - Xitracs
 - January 27th – Credo Core Planning
 - February 2nd – Nuventive/TracDat
 - February 16th – Live Text

Agenda items from office of provost and OSLIA: Dr. Pace met with Drs. Bullard and Brunson as well as Mr. John Calahan on January 20th to discuss possible agenda items for UASC discussion. Several topics related to these agenda items were discussed, including:

- Assessment software: Conversations with staff at Nuventive indicate that SFA is not currently using all of the features that TracDat offers. With some modifications, we may be able to make TracDat meet our needs. Council members agreed that various cost/benefit issues related to the purchase of new assessment software should be considered. For example, large financial and time costs for training personnel on new software may outweigh the benefits to the university. Another factor to be considered is the transfer of existing data currently stored in TracDat; adopting new software might require saving current TracDat information as pdf files and uploading into any new system as attachments. Members also noted that some units at SFA make heavy use of LiveText. Based on SFA's current investment in both TracDat and LiveText, it may be that both have capabilities that could be modified to better meet our institutional needs. In summary, the UASC recommends that the university carefully consider what areas need to be addressed and whether or not the current programs can be enhanced to meet these needs before deciding to change providers.
- UASC responsibilities: Dr. Bullard suggested that the UASC consider revising its description of purpose to explicitly include providing advice/recommendations to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and other university leaders regarding assessment and overall institutional effectiveness. The council agreed to modify its original charge document and resubmit a draft to the provost. Members also noted that current council

membership from non-academic units is limited; if council recommendations are to include those for overall institutional effectiveness, additional representation may need to be considered.

- Position of Director of the OSLIA: The provost asked that the UASC serve as the search committee for this position. Before initiating such a search, the council will request clarification on a specific job description and potential funding for the position. Council members also noted that it would be helpful to have job descriptions for the different positions currently staffed in the OSLIA.
- Improving communication, effective use of data and budgetary efficiency: Council members suggested several possibilities. One option discussed was some realignment to provide links between the Office of Institutional Research and the OSLIA. Council members noted that assessment at the department level is more related to program and curricular issues, whereas institutional effectiveness is broad and encompasses effectiveness of the university as whole. However, strong connections between these two units might provide more powerful use of existing data for the purpose of improvement at all levels of the institution. Another suggestion was the idea of having LiveText maintained by the Center for Teaching and Learning as they are already the support center for D2L.
- Assessment of objectives previously addressed in the Educ-Chair reports: Dr. Pace communicated that in their meeting, Dr. Brunson noted that some objectives no longer addressed in Educ-Chair reports will need to be addressed within programs or possibly at the dean level. Dr. Brunson agreed to provide references to any specific SACS standards that are of particular concern (e.g., assessment of advising). Research and community/public service initiatives must also be addressed.
- Linking unit level objectives to SFA's strategic plan: Council members noted that units cannot link their objectives to the university's strategic plan until it is updated. Currently, there are no goal statements from the SFA 2023 strategic plan in TracDat.
- Cross-disciplinary team: Dr. Bullard would like input from the council regarding the creation and possible membership of a cross-disciplinary team to think about how the institution uses data. Dr. Brown mentioned that there was a "data team" that was formed about two years ago. Dr. Williams shared that the GIS program in the College of Forestry and Agriculture is currently involved in a cross-disciplinary committee investigating possible off-campus program sites and collaboration opportunities with multiple colleges. He added that Dr. Bullard is aware of the large amount of data that has been collected for this study that can be used to help with recruiting efforts. The council supported formation of a type of "think tank" or educational/awareness team and several related suggestions are noted below.
 - Such a team should consider the type of data we already have and how it can be used even more effectively as well as what additional data we might want to collect.
 - Team members might be people who already have questions to bring to the table.
 - The team should include statisticians and faculty who may have experience or expertise in both qualitative and quantitative analysis and who add cross-disciplinary perspectives.
- Measuring transformative experiences: On a related note, the council discussed the issue of how we might measure SFA's overarching goal of providing transformative

experiences for students. One measure might be the percentage of students that enroll in courses that could be labeled “transformative courses”. However, members noted that we might also want to design a way to evaluate the impact from the student’ perspectives of courses/experiences intended as transformative. One suggestion was polling alumni, possibly five years after graduation, and asking for their feedback regarding what they perceived as transformative.

Other Items:

- Dr. Pace shared that Mr. Calahan is investigating the use of the Power BI data analytics tool to which we have access. Dr. Brown added that this is another tool that can be used to access large sets of data and can create effective visual representations.
- Dr. Bullard has suggested the possibility of hosting some type of “impact forum”, perhaps annually or once a semester, to highlight improvements or other valuable outcomes of the assessment process within units across campus.
- The group briefly discussed measuring effectiveness of strategic initiatives and Dr. Pace distributed a presentation developed by Mr. Calahan. The purpose of the document was simply to provide information and Dr. Pace suggested that council members review it for possible discussion at a later meeting.
- In relation to the function of all university-level assessment committees, the council briefly discussed needing a better understanding of the specific roles of the Core Curriculum Advisory Committee and the Core Curriculum Assessment Committee (CCAC). Dr. Wooten, also a member of the CCAC, noted that the CCAC had considered removing senior level assessment of core objectives but that Dr. Brunson felt such assessment was needed for comparison purposes. Further discussion involved possible ways to increase informed communication between the various committees, including having some cross membership and/or purposeful sharing of information.
- Council members briefly reviewed progress to date on the recommendations made to the provost last year. Specifically in regards to transitioning ownership and responsibility for assessment from a single office to the campus community, the council noted that this would naturally include appropriate alignment of supporting resources; for example, support could include funding for graduate students to assist with assessment responsibilities at the unit level.

Action Steps:

- Dr. Pace will modify its original charge document to reflect the provost’s request and circulate a draft to the council.
- Dr. Pace will solicit clarification on a specific job description and potential funding for the position of OSLIA director.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00pm.