

Personal Narrative, Senior Academic Specialist

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Director, Academic Assessment, Program Review, and Accreditation
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In September, 2000 I took a position at Michigan State University as the Director of Assessment. My task was to help academic departments develop and implement procedures to assess student learning---a relatively new requirement for institutional accreditation. The initial appointment was for three years with the understanding the need for the position would be re-evaluated at the end of that time period. Twelve year later I am still at MSU. I continue to work with academic departments on student learning outcomes assessment, but also with institutional academic program review, and both programmatic and institutional accreditation processes. I have done invited workshops on assessment at other institutions, both nationally and internationally, spoken at national conferences, and become very involved in several capacities with the Higher Learning Commission (our regional accreditor). And it all began because we missed a deadline.

In 2001 the Higher Learning Commission and the American Association of Higher Education (a professional organization no longer in existence) partnered to provide the first workshop to teach institutions what assessment was and how it should be implemented on campuses. They were providing information about this upcoming workshop at a conference I was attending and they told us the response had been overwhelming. Registration had closed earlier than they had anticipated---and MSU had missed it. I knew we needed to be there in some capacity so after the presentation I approached the workshop leaders and offered to act as an outside evaluator. I would listen to the conversations in the room and offer the presenters feedback at the end of each day. What seemed to be working? What were the institutional teams still struggling with? What concepts still seemed to need clarification? And six months after the workshop I would follow up with the team leaders to discuss the ways in which the workshop impacted institutional assessment on their campuses.

The workshop leaders agreed. And with that workshop, I entered into a relationship with the Higher Learning Commission which continues to this day. Not only has it provided me with many outstanding professional opportunities, that relationship has also served MSU very well. I am able to stay abreast of the ways in which accreditation constantly changes, how federal regulations and the current political climate will impact accreditation and how that will in turn impact Michigan State University.

I am a consultant-evaluator for the Higher Learning Commission. In that role I serve as a member of the accreditation site visit team to other institutions. I will be doing an accreditation visit in 2012 at a highly complex for profit institution with both domestic and international sites

and will serve as one of two vice-chairs for this visit. Within the next two years I anticipate moving into the position of team chair for accreditation review visits.

In addition to these activities I also mentor in two very specific workshop and development activities with the Higher Learning Commission. The first is the Assessment Workshop in which institutions send a small team of people to develop assessment processes for their campus. The second is the much more intensive and complex Assessment Academy. Institutions make a four year commitment to develop a project (or projects) designed to result in deep and lasting change on the campus. When the Academy began, it was the first time the Higher Learning Commission had ever undertaken such a multi-faceted and time intensive project with institutions. I was privileged to be one of the mentors in their inaugural year, working with approximately fifteen different institutions over three workshops. Since that time I have probably worked with over 50 different institutions in my capacity as a mentor. Not only do I mentor, I also train other mentors to lead the process and work with their individual teams.

In addition to work with the Higher Learning Commission I served on the accreditation review team to UCLA for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and also as a member of an institutional program review team for the Ohio Board of Regents. My involvement with accreditation has led to other opportunities to represent MSU in the area of assessment. I have done invited workshops at Ferris State University, Oakland University, and most recently at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. In June, 2011 I gave the keynote address at the annual meeting of the Institute of Food Technologists, Educational Division, focusing on strategies to assess their specific programmatic certification standards.

My involvement with accreditation has quite naturally influenced and expanded my position here at MSU. When I began my position in 2000, my primary responsibilities centered on the assessment of student learning outcomes in academic departments. There was no formal expectation to work with the wider accreditation processes. It was my own interest that initiated and helped to build the deeper relationship between MSU and the HLC. Now, in 2012, the expectations include continuing and fostering our relationship with our accreditor, understanding and translating the ever increasing complexities of regional accreditation, and preparing the institution for ongoing successful accreditation reviews. With the advent of Academic Program Review in 2008, my responsibilities increased to direct and manage that process with academic units. Another natural extension was the addition of programmatic accreditation as those agencies develop and expand their own expectations for the assessment of student learning within their disciplines.

Institutional and programmatic accreditation, academic program review, and the assessment of student learning all interface and complement one another. As a one-person office, I work to assist and guide academic units on campus as they develop and implement assessment strategies to address issues of student learning within the context of program review and accreditation. I

also work with broader institutional initiatives such as the Neighborhood project, the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), and the Study Abroad Research Council.

As the awareness of assessment has grown over the years, so too has the demand for accountability. As a result, MSU has been involved in several national initiatives around this issue and I have acted as the assessment consultant on several of those, including projects on integrative learning with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, personal and social responsibility with the American Association of Colleges and Universities, and the impact of international experiences with the American Council on Education. The CIC has recently begun a joint project with the National Institute for Learning Outcomes (NIOLA) to identify and examine assessment processes at large research institutions and I represent MSU in that initiative.

My position has changed over the eleven years I have been at MSU and I continue to enjoy the challenge the expanded role provides. I appreciate the opportunity to represent MSU to the larger higher education community and believe I have developed a capacity for leadership that allows me to do that effectively and that makes promotion to Senior Academic Specialist an appropriate action.