Report on Reaccreditation with the Higher Learning Commission

Southeast Missouri State University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States. Southeast participates in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) initiative with the HLC, a continuous improvement protocol developed for previously accredited institutions. Consistent with the AQIP protocol, a team of evaluators from HLC conducted a Systems Appraisal of Southeast in 2010 during which the evaluators reviewed the University's description of how it meets its accreditation requirements, as written in a document titled the Systems Portfolio. As part of the Systems Appraisal, the evaluators made a series of recommendations about how Southeast could improve its effectiveness. Many of these recommendations involved strengthening the university’s cyclical assessment, planning and budgeting procedures, with special attention to the assessment of student learning outcomes. On May 18 – 20, 2011, a team from Southeast attended a strategy forum to develop a plan for addressing the issues raised in the Systems Portfolio, as outlined by HLC:

An innovative element in the Academic Quality Improvement Program’s accreditation process, the Strategy Forum brings together teams from diverse colleges and universities for three days to generate and test new improvement strategies in a creative, supportive environment. At a Strategy Forum, an institution’s team will benefit from both giving and receiving feedback about the best ways to address challenges shared by its higher education peers. (Source: http://www.hlcommission.org/aqip-strategy-forum/aqip-strategy-forums.html)

Team members included President Dobbins, Provost Rosati, the chair of the Faculty Senate (Sophia Scott), the University HLC liaison (Dennis Holt), a representative from the Chairpersons Council (David Probst), a professional staff representative (Alissa Vandeven), the University assessment officer (Chris Frazier), and the Dean of University studies (David Starrett).

The team returned from the Strategy Forum with a well-defined set of goals for improving its procedures related to the assessment of institutional effectiveness. The primary objective is to develop and implement an assessment protocol which includes these components: solicits input from all stakeholder groups; incentivizes participation; utilizes a regular, cyclical process; includes frequent communication; and relies on automated processes. During the summer, the University will develop a proposed action plan for achieving those goals. A key aspect of the action plan will be the identification of a new AQIP project designed to facilitate the development of an assessment system that enhances institutional effectiveness and efficiency across the university. The assessment system will contain the following characteristics: comprehensive, integrated, documented, and operational.

The draft action plan will be shared with the broader University community in the fall for refinement and eventual implementation prior to the end of the fall semester. Executive Staff and Administrative Council will play a key leadership role in the development of the initiative. Dr. David Starrett, as the new HLC liaison, will manage the implementation.