Navigating the Alphabet Soup: IE, SACS, QEP

Part I: The Institutional Effectiveness process

Institutional Effectiveness (IE)

Institutional Effectiveness is a best practice continuous improvement process of setting goals and outcomes, assessing and reporting progress, and using reported data for improvement. It also is a process that we are required to have to maintain our accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

Our IE work is ongoing, independent of the SACS cycle. The university has purchased TracDat, an assessment database, to support our IE work.

Institutional Effectiveness Plan (IEP)

To participate in the IE process, a unit develops an Institutional Effectiveness Plan. All units represented on the division’s organizational chart should be represented in the division’s IE plans. Smaller, lower level units may be combined in coherent ways into larger, higher level units.

A complete plan includes a mission statement, a set of goals and outcomes, and assessment plans to determine progress on these goals and outcomes.

- **Mission statements** speak to the unit’s role in helping us realize the UNC Asheville mission ([http://www.unca.edu/about/mission-unc-asheville](http://www.unca.edu/about/mission-unc-asheville)).
- **Goals** speak to the unit’s role in helping us realize the UNC Asheville Strategic Plan ([http://www2.unca.edu/sp/](http://www2.unca.edu/sp/)).
- **Outcomes** speak to the unit’s role in helping us realize the UNC Asheville Student Learning Outcomes ([http://www2.unca.edu/aa/SLOs,%20final.pdf](http://www2.unca.edu/aa/SLOs,%20final.pdf)).
- **Linkages** that tie unit goals to the Strategic Plan and unit outcomes to the Student Learning Outcomes.
- **Assessment plans** include the data to be collected, the method and timetable for collection, the criterion for success on the goal or outcome, and the way results will be disseminated and used for improvement.

IE plans do not need to be long documents—a few pages is sufficient—as long as they include the required components listed above: mission, goals, outcomes, linkages, and assessment plan.

IEPs and TracDat

Once each of these items is approved by the unit’s assessment director and Vice Chancellor, all information is uploaded into TracDat, our assessment database. Information is entered into TracDat by category in separate fields/pages. The written IE plan is used to present information in a coherent way to the appropriate parties for approval. Some TracDat vocabulary:

- Goals linking the unit to the Strategic Plan are called **operational goals**.
- Outcomes linking the unit to the University Student Learning Outcomes are called **learning outcomes**.
As relevant assessment data are collected, they are entered into TracDat so that every other year the unit can produce a "progress report" describing what the unit has accomplished relative to its goals and outcomes. The report is then discussed within the unit, with the supervisor, with the VC, etc and used for planning in terms of future unit operations (e.g., activities, staffing, funding).

IEPs and SACS

The focus of SACS is directly on how everything we do enhances the quality of learning among our students. Administrative units may have difficulty thinking of linkages to the University Student Learning Outcomes, but this actually is the most critical part of our institutional effectiveness work. Although administrative units do not offer curriculum, they certainly engage in activities that support student learning outcomes. It is these activities that establish links between those units and the Student Learning Outcomes.

Part II: SACS Reaffirmation

SACS requirements and standards

The reaffirmation process requires UNC Asheville to present information in support of our compliance with their core requirements and standards. Institutional effectiveness appears as both a core requirement—a “must pass for reaffirmation” condition—and a standard. More information on core requirements and standards is available in the SACS Principles of Accreditation manual, 2010 (PDF, 2MB).

SACS and the IE process

Because IE is included as both a core requirement and a standard, we must include information about—and results from—the IE process in our report to SACS. That report is due in September of 2011 and we plan to submit a final draft for senior staff review in June 2011. That means we need every unit to be able to produce at least one IE report by May 2011, which means every unit must complete an IE plan this fall.

SACS and the QEP

The QEP is one of the SACS standards, designed to focus our attention on improving student learning. It may not be the best title for this activity. QEP sounds like the name of an institutional improvement plan and it is, of a sort—it is designed to improve what our students learn. The IE process is the real institutional improvement plan because it focuses on the operations of all campus units.

We don't yet know what our QEP project will be so we don't yet know which units and how many units will participate. We have our broad area and have started talking about the specific topic within that area. Once we have a topic, we will decide on the actual QEP project. It may not involve all quarters of the campus--it could, but many successful QEPs at other SACS colleges have had little contact with campus outside of Academic Affairs.
Visualizing the Alphabet Soup

**Institutional Effectiveness (IE):**
- A best practice for our campus
- A SACS core requirement
- A SACS standard

**SACS Reaffirmation:** Core requirements and comprehensive standards including
- Institutional Effectiveness
- Quality Enhancement Plan

**Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP):**
- Design/execute project
- Assess/use results