PRAC minutes 11/6/2014

Present: T. Lin, J. Webb, M. Bay, C. Dellinger-Pate, M. Kiarie, R. Silady, M. Fede, L. Vitale, T. Radice, S. Clerc (chair)
Special guest: Provost Bette Bergeron

Meeting called to order 9:45 a.m.

The Provost shared with the committee her belief that eventually the Board of Regents will want existing programs to undergo review. Since PRAC is in place, we’re ahead of the curve. The process would likely be: self-studies would go to the academic council, consisting of the 4 CSU provosts and their community college counterparts, who would review the reports and provide feedback to the department through the provost. This has not happened so far.

The Provost also believes that the Board of Regents will expect enrollment and employment data, and that departments make the case for their program benefitting Connecticut and how their majors contribute to Connecticut. New and revised program proposals already include this component.

The committee was concerned by the Provost’s remarks. PRAC’s role is to assess the quality of the department’s assessment program, not to judge the viability of the academic program. In order for assessment to benefit the programs, and students, the self-studies must be candid and reflect both strengths and weaknesses. This is clearly at odds with the idea that the self-studies should serve as public relations material for the Board of Regents.

The committee is also worried by the perceived Board of Regents’ attitude that only employment data is valued, as that attitude often is accompanied by a lack of understanding about the nontraditional careers our students may pursue, or that many of our students will be entering careers that don’t exist yet, or that successfully placing our graduates in graduate programs is also important.

The committee is also concerned that the responsibility for finding employment data will be settled on the faculty, as the tracking of alumni was in the past. Faculty are not in the position to track employment data; other offices on campus are better positioned for this. If the problem is that the cost of necessary software or database access is prohibitive, perhaps a joint purchase with other campuses or a system-wide purchase by the Board of Regents would be more appropriate than asking faculty to perform more non-teaching duties.

The Provost also noticed some problems with wording in the Academic Program Review document, which the chair will revise.

The matter of external reviewers and an expenditure cap was also discussed.

The committee outlined some of the recurring issues noticed in assessment self-studies: New faculty are tasked with gathering the material for the self-study and writing it, which often also includes creating the assessment program, without feeling able to elicit responses from more senior faculty. PRAC wants to ensure that the division of assessment labor is more evenly distributed within departments; i.e. that senior faculty also participate. The committee will discuss the suggestion of including a sign-off sheet with the self-study.
The committee also suspects that some departments are not creating assessment infrastructure that produces data regularly, which would make it easier to prepare the self-study and also honor the spirit of the process of using evidence to improve the quality of the program.

Creating a mid-cycle check in process and/or receiving the Continued Quality Improvement form developed by the administration would help the committee make sure departments are on track for their next assessment review.

The committee suggested additional release time for faculty during the semester they are writing self-studies.

Meeting adjourned 10:50 a.m.

Submitted by,

S. Clerc