

Professional Development Proposal

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07P:350 – Designing and Evaluating Teacher Professional Development Projects

Context/Environment & Needs/Problems

- Higher Learning Commission Accreditation Criteria

In order to continue to meet its mission to “enable all its students to develop intellectually, spiritually, ethically, socially, artistically, and physically in order to enrich their own lives and the lives of others,” St. Ambrose University (SAU) must earn accreditation every five years from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The next accreditation decision will be made during the 2007-08 academic year.

The main challenge for this reaccreditation cycle is that the HLC will make its decision under a new set of criteria. The new criteria have a stronger emphasis on understanding and improving student learning via assessment and evaluation systems that ensure learning is central to institutional effectiveness and educational quality. In fact, student learning and assessment as a core strategy for understanding and improving learning are now embedded directly into the criteria.

SAU must demonstrate its commitment to student learning and assessment by meeting the following requirements:

- (1) HLC requires clear, measurable objectives for student learning at all levels
 - a. University-wide general education objectives
 - b. Departmental objectives
 - c. Course objectives
 - d. Objectives for non-academic units
- (2) HLC requires that all objectives must be aligned with the university mission
- (3) HLC requires that SAU collects, analyzes, and uses evidence of student achievement
- (4) HLC requires that SAU implements a systemic assessment plan and that assessment is a shared responsibility among all faculty members

St. Ambrose currently does not meet the HLC criteria for accreditation. An analysis of the university’s general education goals showed that the goals were vague, incomplete, and not measurable. Furthermore, an analysis of departmental assessment plans found that only six departments (economics/finance, education, mathematics, nursing, physical therapy, psychology) had identified clear targets for student learning and only two departments (education, physical therapy) had actually used assessment data to make changes to their programs. These analyses, conducted by the university’s Assessment Coordinator, along with an informal evaluation of course syllabi, demonstrate the need for a professional development program designed to assist faculty members in developing effective student learning objectives in their courses, departments, and for the general education program at SAU.

- University Committees: Needs & Context

Like other universities, many of the policies and activities at SAU are designed, developed, and completed by committees. The following list represents just a sample of the faculty-led committees at SAU:

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| (1) Academic Support Committee | (7) <u>Assessment Committee</u> |
| (2) Board of Studies | (8) <u>Educational Policies Committee (EPC)</u> |
| (3) <u>Faculty Development Committee</u> | (9) Faculty Finance Committee |
| (4) Faculty Handbook Committee | (10) Grievance Committee |
| (5) Institutional Review Board | (11) <u>Promotion, Tenure, and Standards Committee</u> |

(6) Student Life Committee

(12) Teaching Center Advisory Board

Several of these committees (those underlined in the above list) have additional interest in seeing SAU develop effective learning objectives for general education, departments, and individual courses. The Assessment Committee is assigned the tasks of assisting departments in the development of assessment plans and the analysis of student achievement data. Obviously, this committee would be more effective if all faculty had a better understanding of assessment and if each academic department at SAU had high quality learning objectives aligned to the university mission.

The main task of the Educational Policies Committee (EPC) is to conduct departmental program reviews. Every five years, each academic department meets with the EPC to get permission to develop new courses, eliminate old courses, or add courses to the university's general education program. If the university had clear general education objectives, and if every department had objectives and evidence of student achievement, the EPC would have an easier job in deciding whether or not to allow courses into the general education program.

The Faculty Development Committee and the Teaching Center Advisory Board were developed to improve the quality of teaching at SAU. If the university had clear goals for student learning, along with a system for documenting student learning, these committees would have information they could use to determine the areas in need of improvement for faculty at SAU.

These committees, which are composed of faculty from a variety of departments around campus, would benefit greatly if SAU could develop clear, measurable objectives at the course, department, and university-wide levels.

Targets

In order to earn accreditation and receive the benefits of having a culture of assessment, the professional development program must reach the majority of faculty, staff, and administrators on campus. Most administrators are already supportive of the idea that SAU must develop student learning objectives. The President, the Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Vice President of Institutional Research, and the deans from the four colleges at SAU have all expressed their support in any efforts to develop student learning objectives for the university general education program. The two vice presidents (one with a background in nursing and the other with a background in psychology) have training in developing objectives and assessment instruments. The college deans have all received training in developing objectives from the university Assessment Coordinator.

Faculty members are the real targets of this program. It is widely known around campus that getting faculty to participate in professional development programs is difficult at best. To encourage participation in this professional development program and to maximize its effects, the following steps will be taken:

- (1) Five key university committees will be involved in developing projects for this professional development program. The faculty members serving on these committees come from many departments across campus. It is believed that these faculty members, working together on this professional development program, will encourage their colleagues to participate.
- (2) Requirements will be imposed on faculty members and departments. The EPC will require all departments to develop clear, measurable student learning objectives. The EPC will also

require departments to document student learning in general education courses. The PTS committee will require non-tenure faculty to address how they are improving student learning in their courses. Finally, the President will address the importance of learning objectives and assessment at the Presidential Assembly, which all faculty are required to attend. It is believed that faculty will take advantage of the professional development program if they see that assessment and student learning objectives are part of the culture of SAU.

- (3) Faculty members will be encouraged to participate. Through follow-up forms and e-mails from administrators, faculty members will be reminded of the importance of developing student learning objectives and documenting student learning.

Through the participation of five key university committees, requirements placed on individual faculty members and departments; and encouragement from university administration, it is believed that this professional development will gain the participation of the majority of faculty at SAU. This collective participation will reduce resistance to change and will lead to an effective professional development program.

This professional development program will enable faculty to develop high-quality learning objectives for their courses. These learning objectives will aid in the development of quality assessments of student learning. These objectives and assessment systems will yield courses that are more focused on student learning and will increase student achievement.

Solutions & Strategies

- Needs Assessment

The Assessment Coordinator has already conducted an analysis of departmental assessment plans that demonstrates the need for a professional development program designed to assist faculty in developing quality student learning objectives. To better identify specific needs of each department, the Assessment Coordinator and the Vice President of Institutional Research will examine syllabi from all courses offered at SAU. It is believed that certain departments that are already required to develop objectives (education, industrial engineering, nursing, and physical therapy) may not need any additional training in developing objectives. An examination of syllabi will identify faculty members who do not need training and who, in fact, may be able to assist in training other faculty members.

- Solutions

In order to train faculty members in the development of objectives and to help SAU develop a culture of assessment, the following solutions are proposed:

- (1) Workshops & group work to help faculty members develop student learning objectives
- (2) Workshops on developing rubrics, assessment methods, and the analysis of assessment data
- (3) Teaching Circles (informal workshops) to encourage the development of course objectives
- (4) Brown Bag Seminars (informal presentations) to discuss assessment strategies
- (5) E-mail updates from the President and Vice President of Institutional Research

- (6) PTS reviews of faculty members for tenure/promotion (add assessment requirements)
- (7) Program reviews by the EPC (require departments to have objectives and assessment systems)
- (8) The President will stress the importance of assessment and objectives at the Assembly
- (9) The Assessment Committee will meet with each academic department over the next 3 years
- (10) The Assessment Committee will require each department to submit an annual assessment update form.

Process Goals & Objectives

- (1) To provide high-quality training so that each department and faculty member is able to develop clear, measurable student learning objectives and assessments
- (2) To ensure faculty develop objectives for their departments and courses through follow-up encouragement and requirements using the infrastructure of committees (teaching circles, brown bag seminars, promotion requirements)
- (3) To ensure departments develop high-quality learning objectives through requirements (EPC program reviews, annual assessment update forms)
- (4) To communicate the importance of assessment and student learning objectives every semester to every faculty member (e-mails, presidential assembly, committee meetings)

Inputs & Resources

This professional development program, as designed, fits into the current structure of committees at SAU. Incorporating the professional development into the existing activities of the committees will maximize participation by faculty and minimize the resources required for the program:

- (1) Time and participation of the Assessment Committee, Educational Policies Committee, Faculty Development Committee, Promotion/Tenure/Standards Committee, and the Teaching Center Advisory Board
- (2) Time, support, and participation of administrators: President, VP of Institutional Research, VP of Academic Affairs, College Deans
- (3) Faculty time, participation, and effort
- (4) Time and funds for workshops, presentations, and assessment update forms. Since these activities will take place within the current committee structure, these activities should not require additional resources
- (5) Money from the assessment budget to supplement committee budgets

Activities

This professional development program will meet its goals through four types of activities:

- (1) Encouragement (activities informing faculty of the benefits of well-written objectives)
- (2) Requirements (forms that faculty must complete, requirements for promotion or tenure)
- (3) Training (workshops, group activities, seminars designed to increase faculty skills)
- (4) Follow-up (meetings, requirements, structures to ensure faculty are developing objectives)

Each key faculty committee will be responsible for specific projects. The table on the following page describes each committee's responsibilities.

Outputs

This professional development program will result in the following outputs:

- (1) General Education objectives
- (2) Departmental objectives
- (3) Annual assessment update forms completed by departments
- (4) Objectives for courses on syllabi
- (5) Accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission

The quality of each of these outputs will be determined by an evaluation of the program.

Outcomes

The professional development program will result in the following outcomes:

- (1) The Educational Policies Committee will have clear guidelines for evaluating potential General Education courses
- (2) Students will have clear learning targets in General Education courses, in their departments, and in each course they take
- (3) General Education courses will be more focused on the university's mission. Departments and the courses they teach will be aligned with the university vision.
- (4) Departments will develop assessment systems which will allow them to modify courses and/or teaching methods to increase student achievement
- (5) University strategic planning will be tied to evidence of student learning outcomes obtained from these assessment systems.

Impacts

This professional development program will have the following impacts on SAU:

- (1) SAU will receive accreditation
- (2) Student achievement will increase due to the alignment of courses to the university mission and the information obtained through the developed assessment systems.

- (3) SAU will meet its mission to “enable all its students to develop intellectually, spiritually, ethically, socially, artistically, and physically in order to enrich their own lives and the lives of others.”

Survey faculty about changes to the PTS requirements and EPC requirements.

- Gather & Analyze Evidence of Participants' Learning

Assessment after objectives workshop. Compare syllabi & departmental objectives before and after the program. Used to determine if goals were met.

- Gather & Analyze Evidence of Organization Support & Change

Analyze the availability of resources (meeting space, time, materials). Support from administration? Scheduled meetings began on time? Were new ideas supported? Support from other committees, faculty, administration? Incentives to participate? (examine minutes, interviews)

- Gather & Analyze Evidence of Participants' Use of New Knowledge & Skills

Examine syllabi, observe EPC program reviews, PTS reports

- Gather & Analyze Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes

Development of assessment systems will allow this.

- Prepare & Present Evaluation Reports

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