

(Draft) Meeting Notes

NCA Accreditation Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, February 26, 2014, 3:30 pm, President's Conference Room, 19th floor, IIT Tower

Participants: Siva Balasubramanian (Chair, *Stuart School of Business*), Matt Bauer (*College of Science*), Carol Emmons (*Director of Assessment*), Jamshid Mohammadi (*Graduate College*), James Meyer (*Office of Technology Services*), Devin Savage (*Galvin Library*), Phil Troyk (*Armour College*), Ray Trygstad (*School of Applied Technology*), John Twombly (*Stuart School*), David Ulazek (*Finance*), Charles Uth (*Galvin Library*).

Guest: Sunil Ahuja (*VP for Accreditation Relations at HLC*).

1. Approval of Draft Meeting Notes from 2/26/2014 Meeting

The meeting notes document (previously distributed) was approved unanimously.

2. Q&A session:

Siva welcomed our guest Sunil Ahuja, HLC's Accreditation Liaison for IIT and VP for Accreditation Relations. Sunil responded to several questions that were submitted by members ahead of his visit (copies of those questions were also distributed).

The first question asked if it was a problem that many of our programs were at different maturity levels re: assessment process. Some programs are more fully developed (measures, data) than others. For example, Colleges/schools that are accredited have been doing assessments longer, and those programs have data for more years.

Sunil responded that such differences were natural in most institutions. So observed variations in maturity across programs are perfectly okay. We need to make sure that assessment data was available for review that was consistent within a program (same measures over time), and that the duration of the assessment data was at least two years (on the low end) and perhaps 5 or 6 years on the high end for the more mature programs.

Sunil also placed his response within a larger context. There are 5 HLC accreditation criteria with 21 core components, and these are spelled out in elaborate detail. But HLC does not say how institutions should assess learning outcomes, nor does it say anything about the time frames that govern such assessment. HLC will only look for evidence that systematic assessment is being conducted. No reviewer would argue why there are differences across programs. Many institutions are new to this process, even though this has been going on for over 5 years.

Sunil then made a case for simplicity. He stated that, when many institutions started this, they made the assessment process overly complicated. They defined a set of expectations that were either too many and/or simply not measurable. Later, they simply had to step back, and revisit the process to make it simpler.

Sunil then made a general statement about IIT. He expected IIT to be a bit ahead of other institutions regarding assessment simply because IIT had the benefit of working with specialized accreditation agencies that require assessments.

Matt raised a follow up question: what if a department changes the assessment process over the years, does that not compromise consistency in measures over time?

Sunil's response was that continuous improvement is very much a part of assessment, including improvement in the assessment process itself. So if a change in the measures were needed in order to improve the program, consistency in measures over time should not be a consideration that should hold us back.

Siva mentioned that 43 of 143 IIT programs had developed satisfactory assessment plans at present. Siva asked Sunil's recommendations on how we could get more programs to have satisfactory assessment plans?

Sunil asked about the components of our assessment plan. Carol responded that such a plan includes program-specific goals, a curriculum map, measures/rubrics related to the assessment process, a schedule to collect the data, a detailed statement on how to analyze the data, what standards will be used to determine if the goals are met or not (cutoff criterion on % of students who should meet a goal).

Sunil suggested that there should be two or three learning outcomes for each program, and these outcomes should not be too complicated. They should be measurable.

Carol mentioned that 95% of our programs have established program goals. Curriculum maps, and other components of the assessment plan are currently the focus of programs that are working to complete the task. Carol also noted that our faculty are taking the assessment plan task very seriously. However, Engineering is now focused on ABET site visit next fall. However, progress is being made.

Sunil asked who was responsible for doing data analyses. Carol mentioned that each program's faculty will complete the analyses. Sunil followed up to ask if Institutional Research (or a similar body) will have access to assessment data for all academic programs over time. Carol replied in the affirmative.

Phil sought to know HLC's view on the following dichotomy: Demonstration of learning v. Demonstration of performance. For example, ABET does not care whether the institution taught the students certain things or not, but focuses instead on whether or not the students can perform. Ahuja said that HLC does not make that distinction.

The discussion then shifted to learning goes common to many programs (e.g., the outcomes from Gen Ed). How does HLC distinguish between program-specific outcomes v. common goals across programs? Carol pointed out that many programs have learning goals about students working effectively in team settings. We have IPRO projects that focus on the team experience. Can an academic program not consider team work because that is focused upon via IPROs in the common goals category? Sunil responded to say yes, that is ok. For any given program, HLC only seeks consistent goals and measures (over time) so that an institution can state that they did this and demonstrate (in terms of outcomes) if that worked or not. If the outcomes were not satisfactory, that sets up the stage for re-evaluation to make appropriate changes.

Siva requested Sunil to describe how the assessment process for GENED is organized at most institutions. Sunil stated that GENED outcomes focus on critical thinking and reading/writing outcomes in most institutions. At IIT, the enrollments are dominated at the graduate level, and the programs generally reflect a technology-focused character. It is okay to have a different orientation to GENED, if that is needed in the context of IIT.

The next question dealt with the NCA team visit, its processes and outcomes. Sunil mentioned that the Assurance argument document is limited to 35000 words. This document will be locked 30 days

before the team visit, so the team will have plenty of time to review it. The assurance system can be accessed by 15 individuals who need to undergo online training before using the system. Regarding the outcomes of the team visit, IIT will receive verbal/oral feedback from the team during the visit. The final written feedback is in the form of a longer report (usually 35 pages). Prior to the team visit, the chair of the team will have a detailed conversation about IIT with Sunil. Sunil emphasized that the team will expect that all concerns from the 2006 NCA team visit will have been satisfactorily addressed. So it is very important to read the last reaffirmation report very carefully, and proactively address all the concerns indicated there in the assurance argument.

Sunil was asked if the proposal for Academy of student completion/and persistence could serve as a quality improvement initiative proposal. Sunil stated that yes, that could be a QII proposal, as long as it addressed an academic topic, and it covered the entire institution. Generally, an institution is reaffirmed for 10 years. When following the open pathway, the institution will work on the QII from year 5 to year 9. Under those circumstances, the final QII report will be consolidated into the assurance argument in year 10. Since IIT is not following this timeframe, we need to provide feedback on the 2 remaining years we have (before the team visit) for the QII proposal.

Sunil was asked if he had examples of QII proposals that were recently submitted. HLC did not have too many since the program was started last year. Institutions may have low persistence rates and that is why they make it a priority and allocate resources to improve those rates.

Carol asked if there was any cutoff level for persistence rates to make a proposal qualify for QII? Sunil responded that there was no cutoff level. It is our project, so we have to think through what will work for our institution.

Jamshid asked Sunil if we could propose to increase/improve minority students in STEM areas? Sunil responded yes, if it will impact the whole institution.

The next question focused on how long does the review process take for the proposal? Reviewers have 30 days to evaluate the proposal. If there are questions during this review, the institutions that submitted the proposal will respond to those, and there will be a second round of reviews. Usually, the whole process takes 3 months to complete.

Usually, the proposals deal with a limited range of topics: assessment, financial condition, institutional diversity, gender diversity, communications or governance issues. In preparing the proposal, the institution usually describes why this topic is important. After the proposal is implemented, the institution focuses on outcomes that demonstrate why things are better now, and why/how things have changed since the last reaffirmation visit.

Sunil mentioned that institutions were generally happy to be a part of the Open Pathway process to reaccreditation. The final question asked if HLC expectations may conflict with expectations of other specialized accreditation agencies like ABET or AACSB? Sunil thought that a conflict was not likely. HLC is primarily about quality assurance that is also important to other academic accreditation agencies. HLC focuses on institutional mission a great deal, as opposed to specialized agencies that may focus only on the mission of a school or college. Regardless of this difference in focus, a conflict was unlikely.

Sunil reiterated three primary areas of concern for HLC: assessment (especially, if there was a lack of data on assessment), financial resources (of the institution), and governance.

In closing, Siva sought Sunil's advice in terms of best practices for reaccreditation, especially given where we are in the accreditation cycle. For example, we have been meeting as a committee for the last two years, we are three years out from the site visit date, we have established Google sites to share info, and are planning to organize a website to share info freely about the committee to external audiences. We also share information about the committee during the University faculty meeting each semester.

Sunil responded with several recommendations. He suggested that we should assign individuals within the committee to write specific sections of the assurance argument. For example, have a lead person assigned for each HLC accreditation criterion, and the introductory and concluding parts of the assurance argument. It is important to get inputs/involvement from multiple individuals because the assurance argument is the story of our entire university.

3. *Subcommittee reports:*

Assessment subcommittee

On behalf of the Assessment subcommittee, Carol noted that the number of academic programs that submitted acceptable assessment plans has increased recently. 55% of the plans have submitted their assessment plans thus far. The assessment subcommittee is also considering assessment management systems. They are in the process of evaluating commercial vendors of such systems. Such a system will help all assessment data to be in one place, so that consistency improves across the entire campus.

Sunil enquired about assessment evaluations for the non-academic side of the house. Carol noted that she will be working with Katie Stetz, Devin Savage, and Charles Uth on this aspect. Co-curricular activities will be defined very broadly. The idea is to facilitate conversations between the academic side of the house and the co-curricular side of the house.

Quality Improvement Initiative subcommittee

On behalf of the Quality Improvement Initiative (QII) subcommittee, Ray and Charles reiterated a focus on two objectives in the revised proposal version: enhancing the first year experience for students (advising and co-curricular activities) and improving the retention rate of students. This subcommittee had to tread carefully to avoid the impression that any changes to the curriculum were dictated by the proposal.

In response to a question, Sunil was reassured that we have a system (DegreeWorks) in place to facilitate a smooth transition to a different major than what a student originally signed up for, if the student wanted such a change. Sunil noted that the single biggest factor that delays graduation (based on national level data) is change in majors.

Administrative Criteria subcommittee

On behalf of the Administrative criteria subcommittee, Dave Ulazcek mentioned their deliberations related to the strategic plan for the university. Walt described compliance standards that are reviewed on a regular basis.

The entire committee thanked Sunil for his visit and his patient answers to our questions. Meeting adjourned.