ABSTRACT
        This paper reviews the literature on academic quality
programs and examines issues faced at one institution in which two
initiatives emphasizing student outcomes and faculty performance as
indicators of quality are underway. In its review of the literature the paper
focuses on concepts such as total quality management, peer or student
evaluation of faculty, organizational change, and human and technological
factors; and it defines the characteristics of quality academic programs as
including a culture of shared purpose, an active learning environment, high
expectations for students and faculty, continuous feedback for both students
and faculty, adequate resources, and good administrative support. At the St.
John's University (New York) Centers of Excellence, resource allocation is
integrated with assessment of student outcomes and faculty performance. The
university uses four categories of measurement to select academic departments
as centers of excellence: input (ability to attract high-quality students,
excellent facilities, favorable faculty/student ratio); process (programs
demonstrating long-term interest and need, and outstanding curriculum);
value-added features (evidence of student satisfaction); and output
(productive faculty, graduate placement, and evidence of student satisfaction
after graduation). Key to the success of the program is careful attention to
the balance between the technical (data analysis), organizational (shared
values), and personal frames. (Contains 30 references.) (CH)

Strategic Planning, Assessment and Accountability:
Their Impact on the Establishment of Centers of Excellence in Academic Departments

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ABSTRACT

Strategic Planning, Assessment and Accountability:
Their Impact on the Establishment of Centers of Excellence in Academic Departments

The ongoing demands for universities to be accountable for student achievement and faculty performance has led to the growth of the outcomes assessment movement. Strategic plans are increasingly incorporating measurement into their texts, leading to debates as to what to measure, how to proceed and how to interpret the results. This discussion will review the literature on quality academic programs and examine the issues faced at one institution, where two initiatives are underway that emphasize student outcomes and faculty performance as indicators of quality: academic program review and the establishment of "Centers of Excellence" for outstanding programs. Support for these and other initiatives is provided by the Office of Institutional Research, particularly in the work of key committees and working groups. The need for assessment to feature multiple methodologies, process management and faculty ownership is explored.

Introduction

The challenge of accountability facing higher education at the system and institution levels has resulted in a climate of assessment that has the potential to influence the way that faculty perceive their roles, particularly in relation to their students. Tension abounds between the dual pressures to be successful at an active research enterprise while reaching out to students, especially undergraduates. Faculty are certainly not strangers to the need to juggle teaching and research responsibilities, but many are only now realizing that public pressures-- formal and informal--on administrators to account for their classroom time, publication productivity, and student performance are intruding upon matters that have traditionally been left to their personal professional judgment.

This paper will review the literature on planning and outcomes assessment with a focus on characteristics of quality academic programs. A discussion will follow of the criteria for designated "Centers of Excellence" at St. John's University, New York, and the role of the Office of Institutional Research in coordinating initiatives that support the various processes of assessment. St. John's is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education/Middle States Association (hereafter, Middle States); therefore, references to the criteria of that regional accrediting agency are made throughout the discussion.

Literature and Conceptual Framework

Middaugh (1995) credits three developments as having combined to make faculty productivity a key concern for American higher education: rising costs, accountability, and restructuring. At the core of these concerns is the pressure to improve student performance by focusing attention on the learner. Even this emphasis on the student takes on varying foci, including such concepts as Total Quality Management (TQM) as a function of the faculty role (Chaffee & Sherr, 1992) and faculty inputs as responsible for learning productivity (Johnstone,

1993). Another prominent concept is that of faculty evaluation by peers and/or students (Elton & Carey, 1989; Gullatt & Weaver, 1995; Tucker, 1991). The focus of the faculty member's professional orientation is the academic discipline in which he/she conducts teaching and research activities; as the member of the campus community, this focus is centered in the academic department. Efforts to achieve and promote academic excellence must of necessity have faculty ownership, which may result in tension between the legitimate dual needs for standardization (institution) and specialization (department). It is essential for institutional researchers and other administrators to keep in mind that the process deserves equal consideration between inputs and outcome measures in order to improve quality (Tucker, 1991; Nordvall & Braxton, 1996).

The reality of life in all organizations (including society) at this pivotal point in the Twentieth Century is that change--and with it, restructuring--will play a constant role in the experience of the participants (Ramaley, 1995). A key to understanding organizations undergoing transformation is to acknowledge that there are multiple dimensions to be considered when seeking to capture faculty performance and student outcomes in a program or department, particularly when their relationship is the focus of inquiry. The three-part framework (i.e., Technical, Organizational, Personal) proposed by Linstone and Mitroff (1994) offers a solution by proposing that each frame has limitations but together they provide a balanced look at organizations necessary for change.

The Technical frame seeks to solve problems through data analysis and model-building while the Organizational frame examines the nature of culture through the lens of process and values created by participants. The Personal frame provides a filter through which participants perceive the reality of organizational events. Linstone and Mitroff emphasize the linkages of each combination of pairwise frames and stress the inseparability and interdependence of the triad components. It is an organizational concept similar to the notion of triangulation of

qualitative and quantitative data analysis long advocated by research methodologists (Denzin, 1970; Chronbach, 1975; Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Acknowledgment of the differing foci and contributions of the three perspectives—individually and in combination—is a key step toward an integrated approach to decision-making and evaluation that is applicable to higher education. The case that provides the basis for discussion in the Linstone and Mitroff book (i.e., the Exxon Valdez oil spill) was influenced by a combination of human and technological factors. It illustrates well the complexity of both the challenge of decision-making and of the competing perspectives.

As administrators and faculty grapple with the formidable task of making their institutions accountable to students, parents, government, press and public, they need to keep in perspective that what may appear to be a quick fix—providing data on student performance on standardized tests—does not portray either the achievement of students or the efforts of faculty. To paraphrase Linstone and Mitroff's suggestion that to combine the technical, organizational and personal perspectives is to change in focus from an "error-inducing to a safety-reinforcing system" (p. 78), higher education needs to change its focus from a deficiency-reporting to an achievement-sharing system.

The assessment movement that has taken higher education by storm in the last decade has seen the infusion of business concepts such as TQM into its vocabulary. Such concepts cannot be imposed by administrators but need faculty involvement at the classroom and curriculum level. According to Chaffee and Sherr (1992, p. 93), quality cannot be perceived by suspicious faculty as "another management fad from the evil empires of business" or an administrative cost-cutting strategy; administrators need "to take seriously the need for a long-term, change-oriented commitment to TQM for themselves."

Planning and Outcomes Assessment

Modern forms of planning in higher education emanated from the annual budget processes of the 1950s. As institutions grew in size and complexity, competition intensified, and the environment became more uncertain, emphasis began to shift to long range plans for institutions (Green & Jonas, 1997). Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, demands by governmental agencies, accrediting agencies, media, parents, students, and the general public for accountability and increased productivity have forced educational institutions to examine ways to strategically plan, assess, and improve the quality of their educational programs (Heaney, 1990).

Elements common in definitions of strategic planning include: a continuous and systematic process of making decisions about intended future outcomes; organizing the efforts needed to implement decisions; and measuring and evaluating the results of the decisions against expectations through organized, systematic feedback (Drucker, 1980). Outcomes assessment is clearly an integral part of any effective strategic planning process.

The primary purpose of outcomes assessment is to measure institutional effectiveness and student outcomes, and to use the results for institutional improvement. Since 1985, most higher education institutions have been required by state mandate or regional accreditation requirements to put assessment programs in place (Borden & Banta, 1994). For example, Middle States expects each institution to develop guidelines and procedures to assess student learning outcomes and overall effectiveness. Outcomes assessment is defined by Middle States (1994, p. 16) as involving

> gathering and evaluating both quantitative and qualitative data which demonstrate congruence between the institution's mission, goals, and objectives and the actual outcomes of its educational programs and activities. The ultimate goal of outcomes assessment is the improvement of teaching and learning.

At many institutions, resource allocation has remained largely an administrative issue. On the other hand, assessments of student achievements have drawn faculty directly into the process. These efforts generally continue along separate paths. The issue is further complicated at institutions that add faculty performance to student outcomes as indicators of quality. As the Middle States standards indicate, "colleges and universities that include research, scholarship, and service as major institutional purposes should assess effectiveness in these areas as thoroughly as they evaluate learning outcomes " (1994, p.17).

A recently released Carnegie report, Scholarship assessed: Evaluation of the professiorate (Glassick, Huber & Maeroff, 1997) suggests that not only is assessment of faculty critical, but that contrary to the conventional wisdom in academe, common standards can be used to assess the three components of faculty work. The six standards cited in the report include: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique (Magner, 1997). Results of a related Carnegie survey of four-year colleges showed that faculty evaluation policies are in place in most institutions. Almost all institutions surveyed are using the following policies to evaluate teaching: systematic student evaluation of classroom teaching; self-evaluation; and peer review of teaching materials and classroom performance. Interestingly, evidences of student achievement are used by less than one-fourth of institutions. In terms of research and service, self-evaluation is the method used by most institutions.

Characteristics of Quality Academic Programs

Culture of Shared Purpose

One of the most important attributes of quality programs is a shared sense of purpose among students and faculty. This concept has been described in many ways and in various contexts, but the essential ingredient is harmony with clearly articulated institutional and

departmental mission and goals. Banta (1993) calls for the need for continuous communication and the right fit between student and institution. Frequent personal exchanges between faculty and students are facilitated by shared interests and values (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

As one of the <u>Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education</u>, a report resulting from a study sponsored by the Johnson Foundation and the Lilly Endowment, student-faculty contact should not be limited to the classroom but continue after class as well (Chickering, Gamson, & Barsi, 1989), a point echoed in a 1995 report from the Education Commission of the States (ECS). In their study of master's education, Conrad, Haworth and Millar (1993) extend unity of purpose to alumni and employers in addition to students, faculty, and administrators. Conditions should be fostered that facilitate dialogue where leaders actively listen to all constituencies. Students, alumni and employers have a place on committees and advisory boards.

<u>Active Learning Environment</u>

The human dimension extends to the total learning environment in order to make the acquisition of knowledge relevant for students and faculty alike. Students need frequent feedback both within class and during the advisement process. When faculty take the additional time necessary to plan and guide discussions, field work, internship and individualized learning experiences, students synthesize and apply their new knowledge (ECS, 1995). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, p. 648), faculty and administrators should

> shape the educational and interpersonal experiences and settings of their campus in ways that will promote learning and achievement of the institution's educational goals and to introduce students to become involved in those activities, to exploit those settings and opportunities to their fullest.

Faculty can set the tone for such an environment by the example of participation in their respective professional/disciplinary associations and being active scholarly publishers.

Faculty actively publishing and participating in association activities who recruit students to become involved in these processes enhance the quality of their students' education by instilling a passion for knowledge at the cutting edge, which translates into appreciation for life-long learning and a sense of perspective as to where learning fits into the scheme of life (Conrad, et al., 1993).

High Expectations for Students and Faculty

Quality education at all levels requires that students be given goals that are placed at "high but attainable levels" (ECS, 1995, p. 17); it is essential that this opportunity be extended to everyone, including "the poorly prepared, . . . those unwilling to exert themselves, and . . . the bright and well motivated" (Chickering, et al., p.11). Expecting students to reach beyond the relatively safe confines of amassing facts involves a degree of risk-taking on their part, with which some may not be comfortable. While to take risks is to achieve greater success in the end, students need confidence to realize that what appears to be short-term failure is an important part of the long-term learning process. Therefore, it is essential for faculty to create an environment that encourages risk but in which students feel secure (Conrad, et al., 1993; ECS, 1995).

Faculty involved in quality programs need support for the labor-intensive efforts required to develop and maintain such experiences for students. The demands placed upon faculty to intensify the time and energy devoted to developing activities incorporating active learning and individualization while extending a publication record is complicated by the necessity to continuously upgrade knowledge of teaching technologies and the influx of students at varying levels of ability with differing learning styles. Banta (1993) notes that successful implementation of such programs requires institutional support of the faculty, specifically in the areas of faculty development for improvement of teaching and evaluation.

<u>Evaluation</u>

Continuous feedback for students and faculty alike is an integral part of a quality academic program. Students bring different talents and backgrounds to their undergraduate and graduate education, and these need to be enhanced and supplemented by new ways of discovery. Chickering, et al., (1989, p.11) notes that

> brilliant students in the seminar room may be all thumbs in the lab or art studio. Students rich in hands-on experience may not do so well with theory. Students need the opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be pushed to learning in new ways that do not come so easily.

Early and frequent assessment permits faculty to determine learning styles among the class and to make necessary adjustments to account for this diversity (ECS, 1995).

Banta (1993) includes feedback for faculty in her recommendation that instruction and evaluation be included in methods of improvement of teaching and learning. Many institutions implement some form of student evaluations of faculty and nearly all require peers, chairs and/or deans to provide assessment as part of the reappointment, promotion and tenure process. It is important that such measures include items as sensitivity to varying student needs and abilities, appropriateness of pedagogical techniques, and accessibility/approachability of the faculty member to students.

<u>Resources and Administrative Support</u>

The best-intentioned and hard-working faculty and administrators cannot develop or enhance quality academic programs without support of several types. The most obvious form of assistance (i.e., funding) is needed to meet a variety of needs, including (but not limited to) initiating new programs, student financial aid, facilities construction and enhancement, and professional development of faculty, administrators and staff (Chickering, et al., 1989).

Beyond the obvious need for funding (and in many ways, equally critical) is an

appropriate institutional infrastructure. This organizational foundation should be grounded in bona fide recognition of disciplinary differences intertwined with the concomitant varieties of scholarly output and service that result from faculty dedicating time and effort to participate in quality programs. Such recognition should be extended to the faculty reward structure, particularly as it is operationalized by promotion and tenure committees (Conrad, et al., 1993).

In addition to the presence of the above components being necessary for support, it is important that certain impeding factors be absent. Administrative attention must be dedicated to the elimination of barriers to quality work on the part of faculty, administrators and staff. A climate of cooperation to fix the process rather than blaming those who work within it is necessary to remove obstacles (Chaffee & Sherr, 1992). The policies and procedures in place for both faculty and students must minimize bureaucratic regulations in concert with the mission and goals of the institution, academic unit and the program in question (Chickering, et al., 1989). Results of the study by the Education Commission of the States (1995) indicates that students consider "understandable and efficient administrative processes" (p. 13) to be particularly desirable.

Centers of Excellence

At our institution (St. John's University, New York), resource allocation is being integrated with the process of student outcomes and faculty performance through the establishment of Centers of Excellence. The first five Centers to be designated are Biological Sciences; Library and Information Science; Psychology; Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology; and Educational Administration. As outlined in the Strategic Plan (1995, p. 25), "the University will seek new administrative initiatives to support and strengthen an . institutional culture of academic excellence, based on our mission and values, and characterized by scholarship, research, teaching excellence, openness, innovation, flexibility, vibrancy, and collegiality."

Higher education institutions use some or all of four categories of measurements to define quality: input; process; value-added; and output (Bergquist, 1995). The criteria for selection of an academic department as a Center of Excellence at our institution can be grouped into these four categories.

Inputs include purposes and objectives reflective of the University's mission and goals, ability to attract high quality students, excellent facilities to meet the needs of the program, and an academically favorable faculty/student ratio. Processes include programs for which evidence exists of long-term interest and need on the part of the public, and a cutting edge curriculum as attested by external reviewers.

Value-added features include evidence of student satisfaction within the program. Finally, outputs include a core of highly productive faculty (both in terms of teaching and scholarly activity), placement of graduates in positions of leadership and/or graduate schools of distinction, and evidence of student satisfaction after graduation.

In addition, the Strategic Plan identifies the primary strategic goal as fostering a "culture of academic excellence" in which "continuous quality improvement must remain a priority" (p. 25). This will not be easily accomplished; continuous process improvement (CPI) and other similar methods of appraising performance are generally considered by faculty to be more suited to administrative than to academic areas (Borden & Banta, 1994). In the past, academic processes have tended to inhibit change. Traditionally, higher education institutions have been evaluated on inputs (i.e., level of resources, quality of the freshman class) to a much greater extent than on any other criteria (Astin, 1983).

A radically different approach will be needed to measure institutional and departmental effectiveness through the lens of quality improvement. The primary motivation for this approach is to ensure that the institution achieves its vision and mission. As a part of this process, faculty and other stakeholders must be involved in the planning process and share in

the power, information, and rewards (Freed, Klugman, & Fife, 1997). In particular, faculty must be convinced that assessment of student outcomes and faculty performance will facilitate continuous process improvement efforts and can increase students' learning. Faculty must be invited to take a leadership role in developing performance indicators and other measures of assessment. Otherwise, they might perceive such initiatives as an infringement on their autonomy (Nedwek & Neal, 1994) and are unlikely to implement any resulting recommendations (Schmidtlein, 1990).

Implications for Institutional Research

One of the key principles on quality improvement identified by Freed, et al. (1997) is the need for the systematic collection and reporting of data. The institutional researcher has a pivotal role as a facilitator in this process. This includes collection and analysis of data to assist with assessment of needs and expectations, as well as assessment of current levels of performance and any gaps. The institutional researcher will also assist in the development and implementation of systems to measure and monitor outcomes (Green & Jonas, 1997) and in the ongoing analysis of appropriate information in a timely and reliable manner (Borden & Banta, 1994).

At St. John's, this process is already underway. As a part of the university-wide outcomes assessment effort, a Learning Outcomes Task Force has been established. Comprised of faculty from all academic units, the task force has developed special expertise in various methods of assessing outcomes. Members serve as consultants to their colleagues, helping them to develop measurable goals for all academic programs and appropriate ways of measuring achievement of these goals. These efforts are being coordinated with ongoing academic program reviews being conducted under the direction of the Office of the Provost, monitored by the academic deans and carried out by the program faculty, who have ownership of the process. The institutional researcher serves as a resource person on this committee and

assists the faculty with collection and analysis of assessment data. By ensuring that information is presented in a consistent manner for all departments, the institutional researcher increases the likelihood of acceptance and use by faculty members. This same principle will be applied to the provision of data to the initial and prospective Centers of Excellence.

Two other related initiatives are underway, the first dealing with the administration of surveys. Like other institutions, the university's operational information system has very limited data to measure student outcomes or faculty performance (Schmidtlein, 1990). Many departments and divisions have recognized that surveys serve as a valuable way of collecting outcomes data. Student satisfaction surveys, follow-up studies, surveys of recent graduates, and others are being used to try to determine the effect of the university experience on the lives of the students.

However, as surveys have proliferated, problems of reliability, validity, and redundancy have arisen. A Survey Committee, comprised of faculty members with expertise in survey design and analysis, and chaired by the Director of Institutional Research, has been created. This committee has developed a survey checklist, and is responsible for review and approval of all proposed surveys. Committee members are available to assist faculty members and departments in all aspects of the survey administration process. The committee also proposes to continuously involve the wider academic community in this process by communicating plans for future institutional surveys (e.g., Student Satisfaction Survey), requesting input in the process, and providing report summaries on a timely basis. These efforts should help to ensure improved faculty participation in questionnaire distribution when appropriate, acceptance of survey results, and willingness to implement the recommendations.

The Office of Institutional Research is also spearheading the second initiative, a Data Integrity Committee. Comprised of a cross-section of administrative, academic, and technical representatives, this committee provides a forum for understanding different data needs, and

sharing and resolving concerns about the integrity of institutional data. This process helps to ensure the accuracy and consistency of institutional data that forms the basis of retention, graduation, and other outcomes analyses.

Conclusion

The Centers of Excellence will play a central role in the university's efforts to become a "model for distinctiveness in the 21st century" (Strategic Plan, p. 8). Freed, et al. (1997) suggests that continuous process improvement implies that employers and other stakeholders should be included in the assessment process in order that educational programs be continuously redesigned based on a combination of faculty knowledge and expertise with employers' expectations. Students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness will be introduced university-wide in fall 1998. The use of these and other assessment tools by faculty in the Centers of Excellence can serve as a model for the rest of the university.

The Office of Institutional Research has assumed a leadership role in efforts to achieve the University's goal of fostering a culture of academic excellence through continuous quality improvement. It is through the efforts of the Director working with faculty, the Provost, the deans and other academic administrators that the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan are being addressed. Key to the spirit of shared purpose and cooperation has been the concerted effort to keep in perspective the mix of the technical, organizational, and personal frames outlined by Linstone and Mitroff (1994). It is only through careful attention to the balance between the technical (data analysis) and organizational (shared values derived through a participatory process) frames that the critical personal perspective (i.e., the sense of individual stakeholders of the reality of organizational events) be maintained.

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