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Beginning Blueprint: Electronic Exhibits for a Teacher Education Accreditation Council Academic Audit

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This study illustrates the development, usability, and advantages of an electronic exhibit for the TEAC (Teacher Education Accreditation Council) academic audit from the perspective of program education faculty. The examination of the successful utilization of electronic exhibits for teacher licensure and educational leadership program IBs (inquiry briefs) provided a post-audit opportunity for process reflection and refinement. IB components, program claims, and TEAC standards provide critical elements for the design and organization of the electronic exhibit room. Technology was effectively used to demonstrate the overall quality of programs and create a system for sharing the story of one school of education. Conclusions include electronic exhibit room advantages and disadvantages for faculty and program improvement. This article summarizes the academic audit at Regent's School of Education and suggests recommendations for exhibit development and presentation of electronic evidence for accreditation.

Keywords: electronic exhibit, accreditation, TEAC (Teacher Education Accreditation Council), higher education, academic audit

At the prompting from the U.S. Department of Education and state department of education, national accreditation of education preparation programs have placed a greater emphasis on accountability and assessment. The demands of the current accreditation process for faculty and staff can be overwhelming. Overwhelming for faculty due in part to shrinking resources, dual faculty roles of professor and assessment manager, and the pressures associated with collaboration across multiple offices to organize the large volume of evidence in alignment with program claims, state regulations, and TEAC (Teacher Education Accreditation Council) principles. As a final task of the accreditation process, program faculty must determine the best system to present or exhibit program data and artifacts that will prove to be easily accessible and meaningful during the onsite TEAC Academic Audit.

This article illustrates the development, usability, and advantages of an electronic exhibit for the TEAC academic audit from the perspective of education faculty. These findings address the authors' driving questions of how the electronic exhibit was developed and it is usability in the TEAC academic audit process. The study demonstrates that the electronic exhibit can be used as an effective tool to address the process for joint reviews and achieve accreditation for a medium sized, southeastern, private Christian school of education (Regent

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University). A review of the TEAC IB (inquiry brief), program claims, evidence for claims, and academic audit procedures are described, followed by a discussion of the electronic exhibits and an overview of the academic audit preparation phase. This paper concludes with recommendations for the improvement to the TEAC academic audit process and the development of the electronic exhibit Website. The authors believe that the current study will aid education faculty and administrators in the preparation process for the academic audit and development of electronic exhibits.

Background

The documentation and collection of program evidence in support of program claims and TEAC principles should be an ongoing process that may intensify in the months leading to the culminating academic audit. As is the case with most institutions attempting initial accreditation, this process may seem more like a rush for the finish line. Zimmerly and Salzman (2001) described the experience as a potential alarm clock reminding the faculty of their responsibility to demonstrate and document quality teacher education and its outcomes.

The majority of literature surrounding preparation for the academic audit and teacher preparation program accreditation are the by-products of institutional experiences with the older of the two national educational accreditation organizations, the NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education). There is limited research surrounding the use of electronic exhibit rooms in support of the general processes of the TEAC academic audit. The authors did find literature describing several models of the integration of technology in education as well as tools for the support of NCATE accreditation processes and Websites (Maxim, 2004; Zimmerly & Salzman, 2001). Generally, the research focused on aspects of technology in education, highlighting the technical capabilities or resources available to support assessment management and data collection. Many NACTE accredited institutions have long selected the opportunity to create an electronic exhibit room where the majority of programs or unit exhibits evidence of program outcomes for the audit or visit by the auditors. Neither TEAC nor NCATE requires electronic exhibits for the academic audit and related visits, but in 2000, NCATE established the integration of technology as a priority for teacher education institutions (NCATE, 2000). The NCATE electronic exhibit is strongly encouraged and criteria for development and timelines for availability are promoted and outlined on the organization's Website (http://www.ncate.org/Accreditation/PreparingfortheVisit/TheExhibitRoom/ElectronicExhibitRooms/tabid/289/Default.aspx). In comparison, according to TEAC's Executive Vice President, Diana Rigden, "As of 2011, very few TEAC accredited institutions have used the Electronic Exhibit or Website for the Academic Audit, nor have any guidelines been produced by TEAC" (personal communication, August 8, 2011). The authors of this article have been involved with several recent international conference discussions and presentations highlighting the benefits and actual strategies for development of electronic exhibits. Furthermore, the authors believe that the recent consolidation of the two national teacher education accreditation organizations under a new organization the CAEP (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation) will raise the level of standards for evidence and the supporting infrastructure for maintaining the evidence. Under the CAEP redesigned accreditation system, institutions will likely be required or strongly encouraged to provide evidence electronically.

IB (Inquiry Brief)

The academic audit has been described by TEAC (2011a) as one of the defining features of the accreditation process. This audit "determines whether the descriptions and characterizations of the evidence in the IB are accurate" (TEAC, 2011a, p. 77). The IB is a 50-page research monograph which provides evidence that the educational program supports TEAC's three quality principles and standards for capacity. QP I (quality principle I) is evidence of candidate learning; QP II is evidence of faculty learning and inquiry; and QP III is evidence of institutional commitment and program capacity for quality. For quality, TEAC's standard is that the evidence is trustworthy and of sufficient magnitude to support its claims. Program capacity includes parity with the institution in curriculum, faculty, facilities, fiscal, and administrative, candidate support, and candidate complaints (TEAC, 2011a).

The IB is based mostly on existing documents found in the program or institution. These artifacts should be produced and approved by all faculty members of the program. TEAC provides a guide for producing an IB so that the faculty members will develop a comprehensive document and be prepared for the academic audit process. This process is outlined in the TEAC accreditation manual and can be found at Website (http://www.teac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/Checklist-Brief.pdf). Both the IB and the academic audit include important planning functions (TEAC, 2011a).

The IB includes: (1) claims the faculty make about the knowledge and skills of the program's graduates; (2) rationale for assessments of the claims; (3) description of the psychometric properties of the evidence given in support of the claims; (4) discussion of the interpretation of the evidence; (5) efforts to evaluate the quality control system; and (6) adequacy of program capacity. The seven required components of the IB include: "program overview", "claims and rationale", "method", "results", "discussion", "references", and "appendices" (TEAC, 2011a).

TEAC (2011a) stated that, "Claims are the accomplishments of its students and graduates" (p. 44). Many programs formulate their claims in specific ways, such as graduate mastery of any national or state standards that are consistent with TEAC's QP I (TEAC, 2011a). One example often used for teacher preparation programs are the INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) standards. Additionally, school leadership preparation programs, such as the program under review for this study, may select the ISLLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) standards.

For the programs under study, the initial licensure faculty provided evidence through assessment of student learning to support the three claims. Specifically, the evidence for teacher graduates speaks to subject matter, pedagogical knowledge, caring, and teaching skills. For school leaders, the six claims required evidence that graduates have professional knowledge, strategic decision-making, and caring and effective leadership skills. Both licensure and leadership preparation programs are to address TEAC's three cross-cutting themes: (1) learning how to learn; (2) multi-cultural perspectives and accuracy; and (3) technology (TEAC, 2011a). The programs in this case study found opportunities to address both TEAC principles and state program approval with the same evidence which streamlined the assessment documentation process. Faculty must be very clear on what claims will be used to describe student learning outcomes, as these claims will drive what evidence is collected and presented in the IB and academic audit.

Academic Audit

Following the submission of the IB, faculty must proactively prepare for the onsite academic audit. A team of auditors representing TEAC and peer institution representatives will visit the campus to examine and verify evidence that supports claims made in the professional education program's IB. In Regent's case, two IBs—one for licensure programs and the other one for leadership programs, were submitted for review. The visit is a collaborative planning and evidence confirmation endeavor by both TEAC and the education faculty to determine if the evidence and supporting information regarding program claims are accurate (TEAC, 2011a). In addition, the faculty must show that program data have been used to improve programs and in a systematic way to ensure the quality of the program (TEAC, 2011b). The TEAC audit does not evaluate the quality of the program itself, but the processes that are used to ensure quality (Murray, 2010).

TEAC accreditation requires that all program faculty members understand and are actively engaged in the accreditation process. In any organization, there are those who are called upon to lead efforts, such as national accreditation for teacher or educational leadership preparation programs. Although these leaders may take charge of the procedures, in the TEAC accreditation process, all faculty must continually be advised of the major activities in developing and writing the IB, be assigned specific tasks, review and vote on the direction the process is taking, and prepare for the academic audit visit. The successful completion of the academic audit will require faculty involvement in the pre-phase, during the phase, and post-phase of the visit planning and implementation.

The key role of faculty following IB completion will revolve around creating an easily accessible presentation of the evidence and supporting documents for the academic audit. The faculty members now maintain dual roles or function as both program orators and evaluators to determine what evidence would best tell the story of the claims regarding their graduates and quality control systems. Evidence for program claims must be convincing regarding larger goals of the program. Program faculty must ask, "What evidences do we have to support our claims that our graduates are competent, caring, and qualified educators?" (TEAC, 2011a, p. 46). In addition, evidence must be provided for data quality and that their (program faculty) interpretations of the data are valid and reliable (LaCelle-Peterson, 2011).

Electronic Exhibits

Literature demonstrates the diverse models for the integration of technology and data management in the accreditation process (Laverty, Wood, & Turchek, 2009; Maxim, 2004; Zimmerly & Salzman, 2001). The diversity and variety of approaches and systems available for electronic exhibit development and presentation are as varied as the many teacher preparation and educational leadership programs themselves. The next section will present a brief review of current practices using electronic exhibits or Websites for the TEAC accreditation process. Specific strategies for the development and creation of electronic exhibit used for TEAC accreditation and academic audits will be highlighted.

Current Practices

Based on recent conference discussions and presentation interest, the authors have found considerable program interest in the redesign of the academic audit procedures to include electronic exhibits or Websites. Although a review of current practices and literature involving TEAC academic audit electronic exhibits

appears terse, NCATE programs are more predominant in practicing the integration of technology. Specifically, the use of electronic exhibits for accreditation processes has been encouraged and guidelines refined over many years. This is due to NCATE's longevity in national accreditation and history of electronic exhibits or Web pages being used to facilitate accreditation efforts. The following paragraphs will highlight existing practices surrounding usability of electronic exhibits and development strategies. This section will conclude with the specific journey of the Regent's School of Education's experience and reflections. Without the benefit of specific literature or documentation of practices, the authors attempted to collect self-reported data from current TEAC auditors or universities known to have incorporated some types of technology in the academic audit process.

As previously mentioned, the use of electronic exhibits for TEAC academic audits and presentation of evidence are very limited. However, several TEAC lead auditors have indicated that a few programs in recent years have provided "CD-ROM's in support of the academic audit" (Rigden, personal communication, August 8, 2011). Rigden went on to state, "Unfortunately, the content of the CD-ROM contained a lot of information that duplicated what was in the exhibit room during the campus audit" (personal communication, August 8, 2011). CD-ROMs were developed to serve as a form of electronic file that contained data spreadsheets, examples of portfolios, and minutes of faculty meetings, etc.. Grzelak (lead IB author, University of Michigan) indicated that the design for their TEAC Electronic Exhibit and CD-ROMs were developed as a result of trial and error (Grzelak, personal communication, September 6, 2011). Grzelak and Benedict-Chambers of University of Michigan (public presentation, February 25, 2011) designed a completely Web-based evidence room for their TEAC licensure academic audit identified as "The Green Room". The University of Michigan organized and presented all program evidence for the academic audit entirely online (TEAC, 2010).

The exclusive purpose for the University of Michigan's Green Room was to have an electronic record system available for the academic audit. The University of Michigan did not have electronic exhibits prior to preparing for the academic audit. "Our electronics records system was designed exclusively for the audit visit" (Benedict-Chambers & Grzelak, public presentation, February 25, 2011). Grzelak indicated other methods of sharing information, such as jump drives, email, CD-ROMs, etc., with TEAC reviewers prior to the academic audit, were not effective (Grzelak, personal communication, 2011). Emails were especially problematic, because the files with charts, graphs, and tables were so large that they were described as "bouncing back" (Benedict-Chambers & Grzelak, public presentation, February 25, 2011). Grzelak indicated that their Green Room idea was inspired by the IB itself and their attempt to replicate an electronic version of the IB they had seen at another institution, Michigan State (Grzelak, personal communication, 2011). Accordingly to Grzelak, Michigan State had the first program accredited by TEAC in Michigan, so it was only natural to review what they had done to prepare for the academic audit. The University of Michigan's audit was successfully completed on November 2−5, 2010.

Collaboratively, the authors of the University of Michigan IB, a Webmaster of this university, and a high-level administrator of this university, created the Michigan Website between August and October, 2010. Website refinement continued up until days prior to the audit visit (Grzelak, personal communication, September 6, 2011). Online editing and additional uploads, as needed, were simultaneously completed during the onsite academic audit (Grzelak, personal communication, September 6, 2011). The Michigan Webmaster (School of Education data manager), the IB co-authors, and the high-level administrator were on call for the

TEAC auditors during the entire onsite audit (Benedict-Chambers & Grzelak, public presentation, February 25, 2011). Keys to success of the Green Room were the Michigan Webmaster that was responsible for Website development and the support of a high level university administrator (Grzelak, personal communication, September 6, 2011).

The Website used by the University of Michigan for the Academic Audit did not require special software. Specifically, the University of Michigan used a university level content management system and a system identified as "Word Press" for evidence presentation and organization (Grzelak, personal communication, September 6, 2011). University of Michigan IB authors stated that the learning curve for Web development was very sharp within a very short period of time, but it was a good use of time and appropriate for those involved in establishing the Green Room (Benedict-Chambers & Grzelak, public presentation, February 25, 2011).

A challenge stated by Michigan's IB authors and faculty related to providing secured Website access for the auditors, the local representative for the audit team, and a representative from Michigan State's Department of Education (Benedict-Chambers & Grzelak, public presentation, February 25, 2011). The academic audit Website was not originally designed as a public site.

Benedict-Chambers and Grzelak (personal communication, September 6, 2011) admitted that the experience of building the electronic exhibit was challenging (personal communication, September 6, 2011), but offered the following observations expressed by the TEAC auditor of the University of Michigan's Web base site:

(1) Easy to use;

(2) Sections and files well-labeled;

(3) Everything worked;

(4) Electronic docs allowed for auditors cutting and pasting to create new accreditation documents;

(5) Some files could have had more detailed dropdown menus describing program, year, etc.;

(6) Huge PRO (programmable remote operation) to have electronic "room" available;

(7) Facilitated auditor work;

(8) Provided admirable flexibility.

Regent's Electronic Exhibit Development Process

In the current study of the Regent School of Education faculty experience, the authors will highlight four main topic areas in the discussion of TEAC electronic exhibits: development, function, advantages, and disadvantages. Through the discussion and review of these four areas, the authors attempt to underscore the usability and effectiveness of the electronic exhibit for the academic audit. Furthermore, the review provides a lens to review and evaluate the current system for continued program improvement.

Development. The academic audit process of evidence collection, planning, and exhibit development is similar to what is done in the planning and creation phases of an assessment portfolio. Hart (1994) defined a portfolio as "a container that holds evidence of an individual's skills, ideas, interests, and accomplishments" (p. 20). The ultimate goal in the use of portfolios is to develop independent and autonomous learners (Hart, 1994). Just as the individual portfolio provides an opportunity for reflection and documentation of achievements, the IB evidence selected by the education faculty should provide an accurate picture of student learning outcomes and program claims.

Electronic portfolio or e-portfolio has begun a new era of technology development in higher education often associated with assessment, accreditation, and reflection (Batson, 2002). This new technology development has greatly impacted the accreditation process for many schools of education as a result of accrediting agencies demanding better organized and accessible student work (Batson, 2002). This electronic portfolio or Web based on collection of student work provides faculty with additional benefits related to diverse opportunities for evidence presentation and organization. For example, evidence may include writing samples, digital photos, videos, interactive research projects, databases, observations by mentors and peers, and/or reflective thinking. Furthermore, much of the student work now completed by pre-service teachers and leadership students is done in some electronic forms, such as case studies, simulations, and reports. The variety of media possibilities allow for searchable and transportable evidence organization (Batson, 2002). The benefits of electronic artifacts and organizational structures provided by electronic portfolio or exhibit Websites are a perfect match for a successful academic audit.

Collectively, the Regent education faculty under study made the decision to use knowledge of developing assessment portfolio and electronic portfolio to guide planning and preparation for the TEAC academic audit. The faculty prepared both a physical evidence room and adopted various aspects to create the electronic exhibit room located on a password protected accreditation Internet based Website. The physical exhibits were organized around the components of the IB and claims. Evidence was color coded by IB section and alignment with the various claims and standards. A resource room was set aside for the onsite academic audit. The room contained all evidence used to address the claims and program capacity. Furthermore, several computers were housed in this room which provided access to the electronic exhibits stored on a specific Website developed for the accreditation process and academic audit team. Faculty were engaged in the selection process for the physical exhibit and they simultaneously considered how these same artifacts would be displayed electronically. Some artifacts were determined to be more easily accessible in electronic format, such as a long list of faculty course loads data and university statistics. These artifacts were only found in the electronic exhibit and not replicated in the hard copy format.

Based on resources and technology skills among current faculty, a decision was made to identify one faculty member and one Web designer to take the lead in organization and development of the actual accreditation Website and related exhibits to be featured. General organization structure and phases for development were based loosely on concepts taken from Helen Barrett's (2000) "5-by-5 Model" of electronic portfolio development. Specifically, the "5-by-5 Model" outlines a 5-stage strategy for the development of a portfolio combined with best practices in multimedia development. The actual stages include: "defining the portfolio goals and context", "working portfolio", "reflective portfolio", "connected portfolio", and "presentation". The first two stages highlight defining goals and audience. In our case, the goals and exhibits were collected and organized around the claims and TEAC principles. The audience included the TEAC academic audit team, but also would serve the faculty as a central location for storage and management of data. Finally, faculty reviewed the artifacts and exhibits to determine why they were selected and how best to display them electronically.

Stage 4 highlights the process of organizing the digital artifacts. The Web designer was most involved in this stage to determine and assess what software and technology were available at the university. Furthermore, the Web designer was heavily involved in the conversion process of physical evidence and development of

various navigation tools. Once, the Website was developed, faculty were invited to view and critique the accessibility and whether the evidence reflected their various programs accurately.

The TEAC accreditation Web page design attempted to match the layout and structure of other regular university Web pages including a left side navigation tool bar containing a simple index of IB chapters and center page featuring program conceptual framework graphics, major links to both the initial licensure brief and educational leadership brief, and supporting qualitative and quantitative data hyperlinks and database. The hyperlinks contained uploaded PDF, Word, or Excel files that could be examined by faculty or auditor. All artifacts were clearly linked to program claims and TEAC principles.

Function. The faculty were charged to consider this Website as a central location for data storage and organization. The rationale for this direction is based on the belief that when the Website is in place, it becomes an easier process to periodically review, evaluate, and update documents. The site would serve as a tracking system that could be useful for the accreditation process and on-going examination of student work over-time. The electronic exhibits serve as the introduction to the various programs and evidence for the audit team. Furthermore, the electronic resources are made easily accessible and usable through Internet access for the audit team members from any location and any time of day.

Advantages. Displaying electronic exhibits for the TEAC academic audit brings numerous benefits to the program required to provide evidence for claims and other documents regarding the accreditation process. The following advantages are described:

(1) As a consequence of the Web-based technology accessibility, the Website and electronic exhibits displayed could be viewed by the academic audit team before campus arrival, during, and as a follow-up to the visit;

(2) Given the advance opportunity to review program artifacts by auditors, this organizational strategy allows more time for auditor on-site interaction with faculty, students, and staff/administration;

(3) A well-organized Website enables the auditors and faculty to access information expeditiously. Furthermore, the technology allows for searchable artifacts reducing the amount of time required to review and study program evidence;

(4) Beneficial for internal communication among faculty and administration for consistency in document review;

(5) Electronic exhibit rooms support and facilitate the continuous evaluation of data that is critical for department/program improvement and decision-making;

(6) Web-based exhibit rooms also serve as a common and accessible repository for program resources and information;

(7) Because of the shared and public nature of the Website, some institutions find that it increases accountability and allows faculty to see the results of their work;

(8) Reducing storage space required for outcome artifacts and student work;

(9) Aggregation of multiple program outcomes in one central location.

From an economical and political standpoint, it makes good sense to have well-organized evidence of decision-making. Many times, it can provide leverage in these times of tight budgets if the assessment processes are well documented.

Disadvantages. Displaying electronic exhibits for the TEAC academic audit brings some disadvantages to

the program required to provide evidence for claims and other documents regarding the accreditation process. The following six disadvantages are listed:

(1) Privacy issues for student work and faculty information may restrict what is included (such as faculty salary data, student work samples, or assessment results);

(2) Some auditors prefer hard copy resources and may not have the technical savvy required. Auditors may prefer to keep it simple;

(3) Public Web Page Access: Once available, faculty cannot hide from content or errors found in the exhibit. The availability and access while benefiting the audit team—provide more time to find mistakes and inconsistencies (Koonce & Hoskins, 2011);

(4) The Website must be password protected and allow only a prescribed audience;

(5) Potential for incompatible computer operating systems between electronic student work, campus computing infrastructure, and auditor computer software.

Conclusions

Following a brief review of the TEAC academic audit procedures, electronic exhibits, and feedback from various TEAC auditors and administrators, the Regent faculty can strongly recommend the usability and effectiveness of the electronic exhibit in the accreditation process. Additionally, the faculty of these programs believe that the electronic exhibit and related Web page development are critical in continued program improvement and documentation of student learning. The authors believe the advantages and unlimited potential of electronic exhibits for the accreditation process outweigh the disadvantages.

In reflection, the process of electronic exhibit development, function, advantages, and disadvantages presented in the current study, the authors wish to consider the followings as opportunities for improvement of Regent's electronic exhibit development process. The original accreditation Website content was developed around the initial TEAC auditor's needs and requests. Following the visit, the faculty must evaluate how the site can be modified to serve as a systematic tool for data management and program evaluation. Following the program accreditation, the faculty created additional pages for required TEAC annual reports and supporting evidence. The faculty must incorporate the resources and required updates into the regular evaluation procedures and practices for the department assessment system or there will be no value in the online resources.

There must be a shared vision by department leadership and faculty to build a culture of evidence using data-driven decision-making for program improvement. The electronic exhibit supported the organization of current faculty practices of assessment and data collection. Student and program assessment were occurring within the respective programs, but without a system for data management and organization.

Collectively, the Web designer and faculty must consider how to best keep the accreditation site updated. The faculty may have documents and artifacts continuously updated, but the updates must be communicated to the Web designer and then upload to the accreditation site. The authors would recommend that the updates by faculty be uploaded to the site at the end of each academic year or semester.

The faculty's effort with managing the data and related outcomes would be enhanced with additional university level computing infrastructure. Unfortunately, with exposure to the plethora of electronic data management systems now being implemented for university and department level accreditation, efforts seem grassroots. Additional resources and university-wide support would be required for implementation of

assessment management systems, such as Live Text, Learning Quest Professional Development, Chalk & Wire, etc.. The department has explored various systems, but without the university level support and resources, faculty cannot move forward with department level system implementation.

Based on the results of the current study, the authors have generated the following recommendations for future study:

(1) The authors plan to research additional practices and guidelines for development and implementation of electronic exhibits within NCATE related resources and Websites. The authors strongly believe that new procedures and expectations surrounding the academic audit and management of data will be outcomes of the new consolidated accreditation process;

(2) Continue to seek TEAC related technology integration practices and procedures among the expanding number of universities achieving TEAC or CAEP accreditation in the future to refine elements from this study to enhance the academic audit process;

(3) Evaluate the current programs electronic exhibit and TEAC accreditation in the next year to determine if recommendations for improvement were effective. Survey begins to collect descriptive data from all current TEAC institutions regarding data storage and management. A survey could be distributed during TEAC annual meetings or via the member data base.

In conclusion, the authors offer this short story of one department's journey in the accreditation process thereby presenting the basic steps in the implementation of an electronic exhibit for the TEAC academic audit. The authors encourage colleagues to use this paper as a starting point for planning. The authors believe that each department faculty must assess their strengths and resources related to program assessment and the integration of electronic evidence. The authors have learned that one of the greatest strengths of education faculty in the assessment and accreditation process is having faculty believe that program self-study and data-driven decision-making are an effective means of continuous improvement for their program and not just another requirement for accreditation. Without the support of faculty in the departments' assessment system and data collection processes, the format and structure of the presentation of evidence will be insignificant. The regent education faculty understand the reality of accountability in higher education, but realize that assessment should focus on improving learning. Assessment and accountability are part of doing business in institutions of higher education today.

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