

Chapter Four

Achieving Our Core Institutional Purpose by

Engaging in Organizational Learning and Improvement

The institution conducts sustained, evidence-based, and participatory discussions about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives. These activities inform both institutional planning and systematic evaluations of educational effectiveness. The results of institutional inquiry, research, and data collection are used to establish priorities at different levels of the institution, and to revise institutional purposes, structures, and approaches to teaching, learning, and scholarly work.

WASC Standard Four

*As we change the way we do the work of education,
we must at every step move towards expecting more, never less,
of our students and of ourselves.*

- John Tagg,
The Learning Paradigm College

The identification of institutional priorities and the realignment of institutional structures and resources to support them facilitates ongoing evaluation and improvement. This chapter describes Humboldt State University's progress in developing the means for engaging in systematic evaluation of institutional effectiveness; the chapter also describes some of the results of such evaluation, as well as how the results have been applied to the revision of purposes, structures, and approaches to institutional work.

Seeking External Guidance and Assistance

The WASC CPR Visiting Team expressed concerns related to institutional culture, organizational structure, and management processes at HSU. The Team described the governance and decision-making processes as "fragmented" and "complicated, cumbersome, and difficult to understand". They suggested that the budget process was too decentralized for a school of HSU's size and believed this played a role in a "silo attitude towards problem solving and organizational change."

The Team specifically recommended that HSU engage a third-party consultant to conduct a "comprehensive functional analysis (process re-engineering) of its budget development and management processes." In response, HSU hired Maddox Management Consulting, a firm specializing in strategic planning and financial management for higher education and nonprofit organizations, to assist with these issues. HSU also retained Keeling & Associates, LLC to conduct an assessment of institutional culture in order to further elucidate findings of the WASC report and help us address issues related to governance, decision making, policies, and organizational structure.

Mr. David Maddox visited campus in October 2008 and again in January 2009. He reviewed key documents, met with participants and stakeholders in the budget processes, and developed a set of recommendations. In his final report, Maddox made recommendations in four specific areas: effective strategic planning at multiple levels; availability of the right kind of information, in the right format; more effective communication; and group processes (which are tied to institutional culture issues).

In February 2009 HSU invited representatives of the major leadership groups involved with the budget process to attend an all-day retreat designed to prioritize and develop implementation plans for the Maddox recommendations. The implementation proposals were developed by small groups of the retreat participants. The groups were chosen to provide a variety of perspectives as well as input from key individuals. Each group worked on a different set of recommendations and then presented their implementation proposals to the full group. The topics were then prioritized and timeframes were assigned to each objective.

Several of the most important Maddox recommendations related to data and reporting have already been or are in the process of being implemented. For example, HSU created its first comprehensive "Budget Book" in January 2009. The Budget Book, updated annually, reports on all sources of revenue and expenditures and includes ancillary organizations like the University Center, Associated Students and the Humboldt State University Sponsored Programs Foundation. Furthermore, most of these auxiliary organizations have shifted to the common management system used on the state side. This has been an enormous task but will allow for all-funds accounting options.

In Spring 2009, a survey was administered to staff and faculty to gather input about communications related to the budget. The survey results directly contributed to the new communication plan developed for the campus that will be implemented in Fall 2009. The University Budget Office has also developed standardized monthly reports for each department, as well as quarterly management reports (with the latter available since October 2008). These reports will assist the university in tracking long-term trends and in making data-driven decisions about resource allocations.

As a result of the unprecedented financial challenge currently facing the CSU and HSU (discussed in more detail in a subsequent section of this report), a number of the other recommendations from the Maddox report have been temporarily delayed. However, once the budget reduction scenarios are set for this year, we expect that a new schedule will be developed to address the remainder of the recommendations.

The Keeling and Associates team conducted a variety of on-site meetings, discussions, tours and interviews, as well as phone consultations and data and documentation reviews. They identified a number of institutional challenges that include the lack of a shared institutional vision, the need for more effective decision-making, a lack of trust, and change resistance. Their report also talked about conflicts between administration and faculty over shared governance. Most importantly, however, the Keeling and Associates report offered a set of key recommendations for how to move the campus forward. Several of these recommendations described a plan to enact a more collaborative approach to planning and decision-making on campus. In particular, they called for the formation of a Cabinet for Institutional Change to address the university governance system and restore the lack of trust, recommended the cabinet comprise representatives of the faculty, staff, administration, and students, and offered a plan for the implementation of this cabinet. The university has followed the majority of these recommendations, as discussed in a subsequent section of this report. The President and the Vice

Presidents are in ongoing conversations with the academic senate about how shared governance on this campus can be improved.

The Keeling and Associates report also pointed to the internal communication challenges at HSU. In order to help improve communication skills for wrestling with difficult problems, the campus hosted a series of professional development workshops called “Fierce Conversations™” in the Spring of 2009. This series brought campus stakeholders together to practice a series of interactive communication methods designed to help foster truthful and open dialogue. The series offered a basic approach to Fierce Conversations™, Team Communication, Coaching and Confrontation, and Accountability and Delegation. In all, 325 staff, students, faculty, and administrators attended all or some sessions within the series. The organizing staff collected comments from all attendees and provided a written summary of the comments to the Cabinet for Institutional Change. (See appendix)

Convening the Cabinet for Institutional Change

The Cabinet for Institutional Change (CIC) was formed in early in the Spring 2009 semester in response to issues raised during the current reaccreditation process and at the recommendation of Keeling & Associates. The Cabinet is charged with initiating comprehensive reforms at Humboldt State University, with the goal of making the institution more effective and responsive.

The Cabinet is working to develop specific approaches to five major areas of change, based on a variety of recent studies, reports and other feedback. These areas are university vision, collegiality, culture of evidence, student success, and campus governance. Focus groups within the Cabinet have been established to address each area. Moreover, the Cabinet is seeking broad engagement of faculty, students, staff, administrators and alumni. Here we discuss some of the Cabinet’s progress.

Open Door for Campus Voices

One of the initial acts of the Cabinet was to provide a venue for campus to participate in the discussion of change, share ideas, and provide feedback. While town hall-style meetings have been held on occasion, it was clear that the Cabinet could not meet with everyone in person. In order to provide a way for all campus stakeholders to contribute, the Marketing and Communications department created a Cabinet website, supplemented with an online community forum for open and accessible dialogue. This has allowed the Cabinet to post progress updates and campus community members a place to share their views and ideas. All suggestions, discussions, and comments are reviewed by the Cabinet, and many have been used to inform future actions.

Vision

This team conducted a university-wide open forum in May of 2009 to collect feedback from staff, students, and faculty. The goal of the forum was to check the ‘pulse’ of campus and determine how stakeholders believe the campus vision can be more successfully implemented. There were many informative ideas and observations which are summarized on the Cabinet website (May 29, 2009 blog entry). Three main areas were identified as particularly needing to be aligned with our vision as we move forward: 1) our budgetary decisions; 2) university-level planning; and 3) university-level communications. A final set of specific recommendations will be shared with the campus in the Fall of 2009.

Collegiality

The focus group for campus collegiality conducted an open session for campus in April 2009 to generate discussions and recommendations on four main topics: 1) communication on campus; 2) development of a more supportive campus culture; 3) improvement of interactions among all the various stakeholders; and 4) identification of the attributes of collegiality we expect and want to see on campus. As with the discussions of campus vision, the results of this session and the deliberations of the focus group are expected to be summarized in a set of specific recommendations to be presented in Fall of 2009.

Culture of Evidence

The major effort of this cabinet focus group has been to help guide the creation of an Office of Institutional Research, as described in Chapter Three. In response to recommendations from the WASC CPR Visiting Team and advice from outside consultants, a search has been initiated for the newly-created position of Director of Institutional Research. The search is expected to be completed in the Fall 2009 semester, with the Office of Institutional Research to become fully operational in Spring 2010.

Student Success

The focus of this team is on evaluating and improving the success of all our students, including historically under-represented students. It draws upon the two initiatives HSU has been pursuing as a part of its WASC reaccreditation process: HSU Student Learning Outcomes and Making Excellence Inclusive. The focus group is working to identify (or develop where necessary) curricular and co-curricular activities for achieving inclusive academic excellence and student learning outcomes. This effort includes the development of University-wide metrics for the assessment of these activities, as well as student retention efforts (as discussed in Chapter 2, the recently-released "Dissecting Diversity at HSU" report provides some key baseline data). During Spring 2009, Student Success focus area leaders met with stakeholders across the campus and cataloged current campus efforts regarding the seven student learning outcomes and inclusive academic excellence. Upon review of campus community recommendations, the cabinet has identified the need for a campuswide Enrollment Management Task Force. A recommendation for membership of the Task Force and for developing recruitment and retention plans has been vetted with the university's department chairs, college deans, Academic Senate, Staff Council, Associated Students and Vice Presidents. The Enrollment Management Task Force will draft the enrollment plans and, following campuswide review, these plans will be adopted and implemented by Spring 2010.

Campus Governance

Campus governance continues to be the one of the most controversial and difficult challenges at HSU. As the Keeling and Associates report notes (see appendix), distrust and loss of confidence has been pervasive, not only between faculty and administration, "... but also within and among the faculty and its governance structures." One example of how these multiple fractures manifest themselves occurred in late Spring 2009, after the President proposed appointing the Interim Provost to the permanent position (as recommended by Keeling and Associates). He discussed the idea with a number of faculty, including all of those on the CIC, and with other leaders on campus, finding that most of them expressed support for making such an appointment without a national search, given the financial and organizational challenges facing the University. However, the Academic Senate and the Academic Senate Executive Committee both strongly favored conducting the national search. When the President followed through with his proposal, an emergency meeting of faculty was called and a vote of "no confidence" was passed (128-4, with two abstentions). CSU Chancellor Charles Reed was informed of the vote but continues to support the President, based on results of a recent external six-year review of

his performance; Chancellor Reed came to campus at the beginning of the Fall 2009 semester in order to confer with administrative and faculty leadership.

Seeking effective ways to address the complex issues underlying HSU's difficulties with governance, the Cabinet's governance focus group met with governance bodies and leaders on campus from March through June of 2009. The focus group documented a substantial body of conversations and ideas that were collected campus-wide. In September 2009, the Cabinet convened with the President and the Academic Senate Executive Committee to urge all members to work together to move the campus toward a system of governance that allows open discussion of decisions and focuses on the best interests of the campus overall. During the current (2009-2010) academic year, Cabinet representatives will examine governance models generally considered effective at peer institutions. Based on all this information, the Cabinet will develop a set of proposed changes to HSU's governance model and vet them with the campus, which will then implement the changes.

Navigating the Budget Crisis

As a result of the budget crisis in California, HSU must drastically reduce its budget. For the current (2009-2010) academic year, HSU faces a \$10.1M baseline reduction and an additional \$2.1M one-time funding reduction.

The President and Vice Presidents have developed a set of budget reduction principles that are tied to the University vision. One principle is that major budget reductions and reallocations be tied to the CSU system and to campus priorities. Another principle states that, although HSU is reducing its budget, the institution must continue to work toward realizing its institutional vision. The priorities set forth in the guideline are student success, enrollment, WASC reaffirmation of accreditation, and revenue generation.

Although these financial challenges are unprecedented, HSU is fortunate to have recently engaged in a series of campus-wide reviews. The WASC review process, the program prioritization results in the divisions of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Administrative Affairs, and the key recommendations arising from the Maddox and the Keeling and Associates reviews have provided key insights for the strategic planning and decision-making we must undertake in order to address our budgetary constraints. As mentioned previously, we have made progress on many recommendations from the consultants and are also realizing momentum in support of the institutional commitments we made as part of the WASC self-study. This work has positioned HSU to strategically modify, reduce, or cut programs in ways that will make the institution stronger when it emerges from this crisis. The institution is better-informed and better-prepared to make effective decisions than even a year ago.

Because most faculty, staff, and administrative units across the CSU agreed to furloughs, providing a one-time budget reduction measure for AY 2009-10, HSU has time to plan how it will implement significant base budget reductions. A number of approaches are being taken, with divisions examining their plans for AY 2009-10 and their program prioritization results in order to make decisions for budget cuts. For example, student enrollment targets for HSU, as at other CSU campuses, are being set lower, which requires strategic decisions about which programs should be limited or reduced in size. At HSU, with academic prioritization underway, the resources that were expected to result from restructuring or eliminating programs evaluated as having a low priority are being absorbed by budget shortfalls rather than becoming available for augmenting other programs, as initially intended. Additional metrics are also being used to determine program viability and guide decisions regarding resource allocation or

reduction through comparisons with other institutions on such on such measures as numbers of majors, student-faculty ratios (SFRs), number of units required, and program graduation rates.

Extending Quality Improvement in Administrative Affairs

When the WASC CPR visit was concluded, the feedback directed HSU to provide data for Quality Improvement (QI) work conducted in Administrative Affairs. At the time of the Capacity and Preparatory Review, the Division had completed an analysis of strengths, weaknesses opportunities, and threats (SWOT) and had formed several project teams to focus on improving various services on campus. Each team focused on one or more of the following themes: customer service, communication, integrity, efficiency, and campus image.

Building Data Capacity and Using Evidence to Focus Improvement Efforts

One of the cultural challenges with this enterprise was getting teams and departments to begin tracking their services. Project teams measured data on campus building security, enrollment applications for specific departments, training registration trends, and service satisfaction rates. Each team learned some basis for measurement of quality improvement projects. Of the teams that committed to improvements initially, many became inactive. Although some teams lost momentum and became inactive, the ones that prevailed were able to demonstrate the value of the improvement process and methods. Some key successes are described below.

Improving Business Information Services

The acquisition and retrieval of important information is critical to effective assessment. In order to support such data management, the Business Information Systems department team developed and built a service request database and delivery system, nicknamed “En Fuego.” The system was designed primarily to improve service, but also allowed the acquisition of service metrics and assessment of customer satisfaction levels. Administrative Affairs users in need of technical support are able to submit a request for help at any time, but can also identify the level of severity or importance of their problem. This approach facilitates work prioritization for the BIS department, as support personnel can see all requests and their priority and can accept the work based on their expertise, ensuring that critical service issues are not dependent on a single resource. The department continues to serve users via telephone, email, and in-person requests, but the use of the “En Fuego” tool has increased significantly and become a mainstream part of AIS operations.

After six months, the department conducted a survey with existing users of the tool to determine the satisfaction level with department services overall. (See appendix) The results reflect an overwhelming appreciation and satisfaction with service levels and staff courtesy, expertise, and professionalism. The survey also confirmed that the service delivery tool was working to accomplish what the team intended: a timely and efficient response, resolution, and communication to allow users to continue working.

Coordinating HSU Training and Professional Development

In the Fall of 2008 the Humboldt State Training and Professional Development Collaborative (TPDC) was developed, representing an effort to cross division lines and enhance institutional capacity to conduct training and to track and measure training effectiveness. This self-organized group began with the intent of various campus training professionals to determine if resources, knowledge and tools could be employed more effectively. The first group project was to identify and adopt a shared, central training registration tool. Requirements were developed, models were researched, and tools were identified that could capture meaningful metrics and insights about training and professional development at HSU.

The group consulted with managers in their respective divisions; as a result, a Memorandum of Understanding among ITS, Human Resources, and Business Services allowed the group to proceed further with the project and implement the tools that best met the criteria.

The University can now develop a historical perspective on seminars, training, and professional development, allowing for an assessment of what training has accomplished, what the critical needs are, and what can be done to improve resources, content, and collective professional learning on campus. The value of the registration and communication tools was demonstrated recently when furlough-specific information, policy, payroll changes, and management classes were quickly made available to the campus community. Data about which groups are being served, and to what degree their needs are being met, will shape future offerings.

Using Data to Monitor Website Effectiveness

In the Spring of 2008, trainers started to teach departments how to use a free internet service called Google Analytics. This technology allows departments to assess how their website is being utilized by visitors by tracking a variety of metrics and data points. Plant Operations, Human Resources, Finance and Budget, Business Information Services (now AIS), the Oceanography department, and Training & Professional Development sites are able to use the reports to help understand the needs of online visitors and determine site improvements.

Lowering Costs and Improving Quality with Team Projects and Assessment

In 2008, a survey of campus managers in Administrative Affairs revealed that the Student Assistant Payroll process was in need of attention. Based on the survey results and consultation with Finance and Payroll managers, a team was assembled to determine the root cause of the gaps in this student payroll process. The team interviewed several campus departments that hired, trained, and utilized student assistant workers. The team discovered that the Student Assistant Time Voucher form was causing too many errors, simply because of how the form was designed. The team committed to changing the student payroll form to see if this would diminish the number of errors. The Payroll Department notes that the estimated fraction of vouchers with errors has been reduced from about 1/3 to 1/6 with the new form, a substantial improvement and increase in efficiency.

In May and November of 2008, the CSU Systemwide Quality Improvement program provided training for the Malcolm Baldrige-based approach called "Excellence in Higher Education" to all Quality Improvement professionals. The program showed promise as a more relevant approach to quality improvement than the previous business-oriented approach because it was tailored specifically to higher education needs. The HSU Quality Improvement facilitator attended the May training, then presented the materials to campus stakeholders at Humboldt upon returning. Based on interest from various campus departments, eight campus employees attended the November session. Three departments have subsequently begun or completed an EHE assessment and planning project: the Advising Center, Human Resources, and the newly-formed Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching.

Revising Institutional Approaches to Teaching and Learning

The support of student learning is the focus of both themes chosen by HSU: the achievement of student learning and the effective support of students from underrepresented groups.

In order to strengthen the resources available to help campus educators in these efforts, a new Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) was established in July 2008. Formed by bringing together the former Courseware Development Center staff and the Faculty Development / Communication Across the Curriculum Coordinator, CELT supports and guides the university community in fostering engaged, inclusive, and continuous learning; it provides campus educators with tools, resources and guidance to embrace learning-centered education. In June 2009, the half-time Faculty Associate for Assessment joined the team as well. A search for a new Director of Learning Assessment, to coordinate assessment efforts campus-wide and provide leadership for the Center, was unsuccessful in spring 2009. As a result, management of the Center remains with the Vice Provost for the time being; however, the search will be initiated again this year.

The CELT team uses a variety of evidence and input to plan its services and events. For example, it collaborates with the Faculty Development Advisory Committee, a standing subcommittee of the Academic Senate, to explore options in programming. CELT also utilizes annual Faculty Interest Survey results, aggregates and analyzes event evaluation data, and monitors participation in events, consultations, and web resources. The emphasis is on developing ongoing relationships for the purpose of improving student learning, rather than offering isolated one-time events.

For example, in order to support the implementation of the policy for improving student writing (see Chapter One), the Faculty Development/Communication Across the Curriculum Coordinator planned a series of two Writing Plan Implementation Workshops in February and April. Both facilitated by Carol Holder, the workshops provided departments with assistance in implementing the new curricular approach to improving student writing. Continuing this support, assessment workshops in the fall and spring will further assist departments as they prepare to assess – and improve – the writing of students in their programs.

As another example, in May 2009, funding from the Provost, the College of Natural Resources and Sciences, and the Office of Academic Programs and Undergraduate Studies enabled CELT to organize a Learning and Teaching Institute, with keynote and workshop by Craig Nelson in addition to workshops facilitated by campus experts. Drawing upon the scholarship of teaching and learning, evolutionary biologist Craig Nelson described how standard classroom practices get in the way of student learning, especially among students from traditionally underrepresented groups, and he stressed the responsibility that we have for changing such practices. In addition to surveying participants before and after the event, a unique “My Notes” form printed on NCR paper allowed CELT staff to identify specific changes that participants intended to make as a result of the Institute and follow up with reminders, resources, and offers of assistance.

The CELT staff has responded to the unfolding budget crisis in a number of ways. Because class sizes are being increased, for example, CELT has developed quick-reference materials to assist faculty with implementing active learning strategies in large classes. Planning is also underway for other course transformation efforts, including the development of hybrid classroom/online courses, to enhance campus capacity and scheduling flexibility while guiding the design of effective learning experiences.

Learning, Changing, and Moving Forward in Difficult Times

In collecting and discussing evidence that indicates how well HSU is accomplishing its institutional purposes, the campus learns where changes should be made. Developing the processes for actually making such changes, however, is more difficult. Paradoxically, while the budget situation in some ways

exacerbates this difficulty, it also makes action unavoidable. At a time when maintaining the status quo is not an option, the question that remains is which actions the campus will decide to take, and on what basis those decisions will be made.

In this context, HSU is striving to base its decisions on what it is learning through the systematic collection of evidence. In such disparate areas as achieving fiscal transparency, managing large-scale institutional change, improving the quality of administrative functions, and supporting the enhancement of student learning, the university is making concrete progress toward consistent, evidence-based improvement.

Working Draft