The Current State and Future of WASC Senior Accreditation – How Best to Make it Work? Panel Discussion at CAIR, Nov 10, 2011

These outline notes of the panel presentation (thanks to Heather Brown) are being made available since there was no PPT, but that they are not an 'authoritative' record of the conversation that took place

Teri Cannon set the stage with a brief summary: Last week the Commission approved the fundamental process to be used going forward: an off-site review followed by a visit (with focus to be established as a result of the off-site review).

More to be built out going forward. Sharing this at ARC in April for more comment and feedback. There will be continued focus on retention and graduation rates, the meaning of degrees...CFR 2.2, and sustainability of educational effectiveness.

Response from each panelist:

Ed Sullivan (CSU). His campus is finishing out on the old process. What jumps out to him is the amount of streamlining. It's been a long ride for faculty – some started participating in the process a number of years ago.

The CSU initiative on graduation will probably map will to the continued focus on graduation rates.

A big red flag is the five graduation proficiencies. A challenge is the likely cost of external validation tools or measures (e.g., CLA). The dollar cost is terrifying from a financial perspective.

Sam Agronow (Saint Mary's College of California). The college is in the process of developing a new core curriculum. The report is due in 2013 and visit in 2014.

What they are watching is the connection to Lumina. They have distributed the DQP to leaders on campus, but they are not sure what to do with it at this point. The benchmarking of learning outcomes is the most controversial part. Worried about being able to norm measures (e.g., critical thinking) against other colleges.

This seems an odd, awkward "tack-on" to what they are already doing. Feels more like a focus on accountability than improvement.

Julian Fernald (?) from UC Santa Cruz. Want to be clear that I am speaking from the perspective of one UC campus.
As part of our last review, we selected retention and graduation as one of our themes. Have done some benchmarking, disaggregated studies, and expected versus actual analyses. Has been a very helpful process. It is valuable IF done with appropriate infrastructure. Appreciate the simplification of the process, and focus on closing the loop. If taken in the right spirit, it can be helpful. Like that it is not

too prescriptive, and that the DQP is optional. Wouldn't want to be forced into using that framework.

While we appreciate and acknowledge the position that WASC is in, there is some concern that the grid Teri and Jill showed earlier could loop around and become a circle (compliance → accountability?).

Nancy Hedlund from Hawaii, representing PacAIR
Our members expressed optimism and positive regard; however, there are a number of concerns.
1. Need informed participants at our universities. We don't feel that our colleagues are sufficiently informed, so we have sent people to WASC and are likely to continue to do so.
2. Pressure for resources in current environment. Need more creativity and collaboration between IR, faculty and administrators. Opportunity and concerns.
3. Challenging to document the whole thing. It is easy enough now to lead faculty through the assessment of learning process, but documenting the process, collecting the evidence, is very challenging to do consistently and efficiently.
4. Assessing proficiencies/outcomes. We are having discussions, debates about whether we should be assessing for achievement or improvement. This has big implications for the timeline and complexity of the assessment process. Assessing multiple times for the same outcome.
5. Concerns about DQP. Conceptually not very deeply defined. The perception is that it will be imposed upon us. Tail wags the dog. Will Assessment tell us what Learning is important?

Teri – in response, and to clarify --
External validation of student learning and graduation proficiencies was pulled. The resolution that passed requires WASC to solicit feedback until Jan 15, and take it to the Commission so that the Commission can consider it before they take action. Teri encouraged attendees to send feedback via email to WASC.

At this point the panel opened the discussion to questions and comments from the audience.

Tina Leimer from CSU Fresno.
Concerns about cost. We are getting faculty buy-in to the assessment process. Initial reaction on her campus is surprise, "Have we been duped all along?" She is deeply concerned that this will erase the hard work they have been doing for years.

Van Novack – CSU Long Beach
Our campus has been lauded for our work (in assessment of student learning?). But I notice how many institutions are currently accredited by WASC, and how few are

in any position of warning or probation. So, my question is, "Is there any incentive for doing this really well or not so well?"

Teri's response – "not yet…"
Chris Cullander– But fewer institutions are receiving the full ten-year accreditation timeframe.

Teri – yes, that is the current situation. Going forward, we're working on a quality matrix or dashboard. We *may* publish how each institution rates on each of a set of key indicators.

Gillian Butler from UC Davis
Are SLOs and graduation proficiencies the same or different?

Teri – we will have a glossary to explain the "WASCese." One reason for the shift in our language is the focus on the whole degree and what students can do/know when they graduate.

Cel Johnson from U. of San Diego
I would like to echo what Tina said earlier. At our institution, we have been throughtwo abortive efforts at assessment of SLOs. Part of our current success is an *internal* focus on what make us better for our students. We stand to lose faculty support/cooperation if we come in too heavy-handed with latest developments at WASC.

Ed Sullivan – CSU Fullerton
We're in the same boat with faculty. We actually had a senate vote that we couldn't publish our CLA results. But this was trumped by the Voluntary System of Accountability. We are expecting significant push-back from faculty.

Nancy Hedlund
And if you lose faculty, you may also lose administrators if they're not already strongly engaged in this area.

But we have also had some discussions at PACAIR about how to make this work.
- Focus on supporting capacity for change at our institutions.
- Become more informed.
- Look for and study pilot projects, find successes that can be expanded.
- Get key leaders involved.
- Use this as a way to enhance institutional goals (related to employers, reputation globally and especially in the Asia –Pacific region).

Sam Agronow, Saint Mary's College
Have some questions and concerns about the benchmarking of graduation rates. Institutions will be allowed to choose their benchmark institutions, but will (be

expected to?) explain why they chose them. This raises questions of how to make valid comparisons. There is good data out there for first-time, full-time freshmen, but there is not a lot of good comparison data for measures on different populations.

Teri –
Yes, these are valid issues that need to be resolved. It won't be easy once you go outside of IPEDS data. Gregg Thomson and others are developing resource materials and guides to address this. You may need different sets of benchmark institutions.

Chris Cullander There is also a tension between the work to do and the available financial and staff resources.

Teri
Yes, but don't expect the Commission to back off. Legislators see institutions with students who don't graduate, who don't get good jobs and are saddled with debt.

Ed Sullivan.
I am thinking about who I need to work with on my campus going forward. Many of our recent WASC Taskforce members are nearing retirement. We'll lose a lot of really motivated people soon.

Bettina Huber from CSU Northridge
I'd like to raise the issue of resources. We seem to be getting more and more detail from WASC. Our response is that "simpler is better."

Cel Johnson, U. of San Diego
My question is about retention and graduation rates and benchmarking. How many schools are we to select for benchmarking?

Teri
We haven't decided yet.

Mike Roona, UC Merced
Wondering if any accreditors have pointed out that there was an effort some years ago to get an IPEDS unit records system going? What came of that? We need a national student database. Any accreditors pushing for that?

Teri
We're not going in that direction. Hoping most data can come from the National Student Clearinghouse.

Tina L.
When we assess learning, the improvements we see may be very small. Foreseeing a lot of effort for little incremental improvements.

Sam A.
To end on a positive note...much of this is discussion at this point. There is a chance that there will be relatively little change.

Here is a link to the press release about the WASC Commission resolution, which includes a link to the resolution itself:

http://www.wascsenior.org/redesign/novemberpressrelease