For the next several weeks, this newsletter will focus on the activities of each of the six Middle States Self Study Working Groups, beginning this week with Working Group 1, co-chaired by Brian Zimmerman of Geosciences and Naod Kebede of Chemistry. This Group examined Standard 1: Mission and Goals and Standard 7: Institutional Assessment to determine if Edinboro met the key fundamental elements and broader intent of these standards.

As described in the Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Requirements of Affiliation and Standards for Accreditation (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006), Standard 1, Mission and Goals, focuses on whether

the institution’s mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution’s stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are used to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness (p. ix).

The Working Group identified multiple challenges we have faced as an institution during the past several years. These challenges included significant leadership changes, uncertain and declining state support, and changing demographics. Despite efforts to keep the EU mission and strategic plan relevant, this had not consistently been the case. While the Working Group initially found that the mission statement did not provide direction for the institution, this finding led to the development of a new mission statement and strategic plan. The new mission, vision, and values statements, completed last fall (2012), reaffirm the provision of the highest quality education to our students as the core of what we do. Edinboro’s new 5-year strategic plan (2013-2018), which flows from the mission, vision and value statements, emphasizes student success, institutional commitment to quality, responsiveness to the community, and diversity. The plan and the corresponding planning process are more closely linked to budgeting and the mission to ensure its future viability.

As a result of the group’s findings, one recommendation was made with regard to Standard 1. That is for the University to demonstrate the centrality of its mission in decision-making and a commitment to implementation and assessment of its strategic plan in support of that mission.

MIDDLE STATES ACCREDITATION: Standards 1 & 7
Standard 7, Institutional Assessment, focuses on whether

the institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards (p. x).

The Working Group’s findings for this Standard showed that Edinboro utilizes a variety of assessment measures such as program reviews, specialized accreditation reports, annual planning reports, annual program evaluations, System Accountability Reports/Performance Funding reports, Student Learning Outcome (SLO) reports, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and Sightlines. Additionally, the results of SLO reports and annual planning reports demonstrate a clear link between assessment and the University’s mission as well as other relevant elements of the strategic plan. However, it was also concluded that the decentralized institutional assessment process and administrative practice has prevented assessment results from being widely and consistently distributed and effectively utilized. As a result, institutional assessment has not had the intended impact on institutional performance and should be improved.

As with Standard 1, the early findings of this Working Group resulted in some necessary changes. Beginning in 2011, a stronger commitment to continuous improvement through institutional assessment was initiated. New practices to establish a culture of data-driven decision-making have resulted. The Sightlines Integrated Facilities Plan exemplifies how a commitment to assessment, planning, and data-driven decision-making can lead to significant improvements in service and performance on our campus.

Since the work of the Middle States reaccreditation process began, the University’s first assessment plan has been adopted, the position of Director of Institutional Research and Assessment has been filled, a data warehouse has been created, and the TracDat database is being implemented to organize operational data and report results. An Institutional Effectiveness Committee and Planning and Budget Committee have been formed to ensure that Edinboro University “closes the loop” on institutional assessment and planning by utilizing assessment results in addressing and linking University priorities and budgeting. Finally, in response to data from the NSSE and the PASSHE Risk Analysis Report, a standing committee is being formed to address academic advising quality issues and the new strategic plan includes an initiative regarding advising quality. These are examples of how a culture of assessment is beginning to take hold, but we remain at an early stage of implementing changes to achieve this outcome.

One recommendation and two suggestions resulted from the findings regarding Standard 7. The recommendation states that Edinboro must institutionalize the procedures and timelines for assessment reporting and evaluation within the new structure for institutional assessment, as defined in the University Assessment Plan. The two suggestions note that (1) the University administration should more clearly communicate the roles of the Institutional Effectiveness and Planning and Budget Committees to the campus community, and (2) the University should streamline the Five-Year Program Review processes so that departments spend less time collecting and organizing assessment data and more time analyzing and acting on results to improve institutional effectiveness.

As can be seen from this brief summary regarding Standards 1 and 7, Edinboro lagged in its response to the new Standards established by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in 2002. However, the University has been addressing these concerns as they became evident, which is a new positive direction for our continued improvement.

The next edition of this newsletter will focus on Working Group 2, co-chaired by Sean Bliley and Scott Miller, addressing Planning, Resources and Governance. Special thanks to Dr. Cindy Legin-Bucell for her work on this newsletter.