This installment of the Middle States Newsletter focuses on the activities of Working Group 5, co-chaired by Susan Curtin, Professor, Department of Middle and Secondary Education and Educational Leadership and Jerra Jenrette, Professor, Department of History, Anthropology, and World Languages. This Group examined **Standard 11: Educational Offerings, Standard 12, General Education, and Standard 13: Related Educational Activities** to determine if Edinboro University 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 11, Educational Offerings**, focuses on whether "the institution’s educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings (p. x)."

The Working Group reviewed current policies, practices and factors relevant to educational offerings. No indication that policies are applied or enforced inconsistently was evident. Academic program integrity and curricular experiences are verified through the university wide curriculum process which includes reviewing for PASSHE policy compliance. Additionally, PASSHE program reviews completed every five years, the annual assessment of student learning outcomes, and in some instances, external accreditations also confirm program strength and relevance to the mission. However, assessment of support services to special student cohorts as well as co-curricular and extra-curricular programs is inconsistent across the University.

Information literacy is inherent in degree programs and support is available through library resources. Evaluation of general education requirements and syllabi from various disciplines reflect compliance with the University mission to intellectually engage and empower students.
As a result of the Group’s findings, one recommendation and one suggestion were made with regard to Standard 11.

- The University should ensure that the University Assessment Plan is fully implemented so that assessment information regarding curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular programming is readily and consistently available and used for improvement.
- While information literacy development is provided through the library and across program curricula, the University should ensure that this knowledge development is integrated into the revised General Education program.

**Standard 12, General Education**, focuses on whether “the institution’s curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency (p. xi).”

The Working Group’s findings for this Standard report that all areas of General Education have been assessed in light of their stated student learning outcomes and that an ongoing review of General Education outcomes are incorporating currently acknowledged best practices (e.g., LEAP VALUE rubrics). General Education information is widely disseminated and incorporated into University-Wide Curriculum Committee protocols used for the review and approval of course and program submissions. It was found that the relationship between General Education program requirements varies across degree programs but recent institutional policy changes require Skill completion prior to higher level course enrollment. Examples of degree program coursework building upon general education knowledge were identified.

The findings of this Working Group regarding the General Education Standard, led to two suggestions:

- While general education assessment has been ongoing for a number of years, the value of the results has been limited with respect to their use in making improvements. The General Education Assessment Task Force’s recommendations should be considered and assessment results better integrated into overall institutional assessment.
- Student instruction on the requirements, goals, objectives, and the overall relevance of the General Education program should become a stated objective of the FYE program and a mandated and integral part of every department’s FYE Common Hour.

**Standard 13, Related Educational Activities**, addresses whether “the institution’s programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards (p. xi).”

In its review of evidence pertaining to this Standard, the Working Group reported that overhauling the decentralized academic support services structure into the Academic Success Center in the summer of 2012, appears to be effective. Initial data regarding student retention are encouraging. However, data regarding conditional admission programs for academically vulnerable students (ESP, USP, and CSP) indicate poor results. Though descriptions exist for a variety of student services and documentation of policy compliance are established, effectiveness data are limited. Contractual agreements for non-credit programs and other student placements off-campus ensure compliance with PASSHE and institutional policies and practices. Distance
education is subject to the procedures established by the University-Wide Curriculum Committee and is assessed as part of the student learning outcomes process.

As a result of the findings regarding Standard 13, two suggestions were made:

- Online course development should follow an approved process for course design, and a representative from the online programs office should be involved in the development and review processes as a member of the University-Wide Curriculum Committee.
- A systematic and ongoing approach to faculty training should be implemented to ensure the delivery of high-quality distance education programs and experiences.

As can be seen from this brief summary regarding Standards 11, 12 and 13, Edinboro’s efforts regarding the fulfillment of these Standards is positively impacted by the workings of the University-Wide Curriculum Committee, which oversees all curricular issues (including courses, degrees, and general education) regardless of delivery medium. The University also maintains contractual compliance where appropriate. Despite limited data in some areas, it is evident that curriculum matters at the Edinboro are robust.

The next edition of this newsletter will focus on Working Group 6, co-chaired by Elizabeth Joyce and Gwen Price addressing Assessment of Student Learning.