USING CIRP SURVEYS IN ACCREDITATION

Many institutions use CIRP survey results in the accreditation process. Because CIRP surveys are comprehensive and designed to examine change over time, colleges and universities have found them flexible and useful tools in their institutional self-studies. Participation in longitudinal CIRP surveys is also frequently cited as evidence of an institutional commitment to assessment and improvement efforts. Through collaborative ventures on campus, results from CIRP surveys are used to document assessment and improvement efforts, as well as to establish the need for and the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at improving the student experience.

Here are some examples of how colleges and universities are using CIRP surveys in accreditation.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

Grinnell College

Grinnell developed a portfolio of indicators for their reaccreditation work, and used survey data to anchor their themes. Longitudinal CIRP data helped frame their special-emphasis study: *"How Can the College Reinvigorate its Traditional Commitment to Educate Leaders for Public Service and Social Justice in the 21st Century?"* CIRP survey data illuminated student goals, aspirations, and self-concept. This information provided a foundation to conduct a self-study that went beyond compliance and focused on a set of questions central to Grinnell's mission.

An examination of CIRP Freshman Survey Data showed Grinnell students reported social commitment goals more often than the national average. Compared to the national population, students at Grinnell and peer colleges were more likely than the national population to want to participate in community action, be involved in environmental cleanup, keep up to date with political affairs, help promote racial understanding, and develop a meaningful philosophy of life. This data prompted further internal focus groups to examine the nature and expectations for leadership and public service among students. The resulting special emphasis serves as the foundation for campus initiatives that seek to be more intentional and explicit about training leaders for social justice and servants of the common, including making goals and models of leadership more explicit in coursework and co-curricular activities.

In Criterion Five of the HLC standards, Core Component 5b addresses the extent to which internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides. Grinnell used HERI Faculty Survey data to demonstrate that the faculty value the services the college provides in measureable ways. For example, faculty were satisfied or very satisfied with their job, compared to the national average. In particular, Grinnell's faculty cited office and lab space, quality of students, and salary and benefits as elements that were satisfying.

The Office of Institutional Research, as part of the Diversity & Achievement division and in consultation with the Office of Academic Affairs, plans and follows a schedule of surveys and assessment activities, ensuring that multiple complementary methods provide a holistic view—as well as specific information—for planning and budget priorities. Future objectives include organizing datasets in inter-connected inventories so that Grinnell can more frequently and flexibly validate findings, applying them in new ways to recognize and advance inclusive excellence and student achievement. ■

"Every group on campus dedicated to improving student learning—from the faculty to residence hall directors to intercultural affairs staff—have benefitted from and adapted their practices based on the goals, aspirations, anxieties and behaviors our students report on the YCFY survey. And thanks to the CSS survey, we have equally robust data sets from each student's first and senior year, which helps us assess and improve the effectiveness of our practices."

—James Diedrick
Associate Dean of the College and Professor of English, Agnes Scott College

SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Agnes Scott College

Agnes Scott's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for 2004–7, "*Enhancing the Intellectual Climate Through Enhancing the Four-Year Experience*" focuses on a central element in each of the four years, including, a transition to college engaging student in the intellectual life of the college, participation in community activities outside campus, participation in study abroad or academic internships, and capstone experiences. Each element of the QEP contains a set of goals and student learning outcomes with action plans for assessing progress. Assessing the impact of the QEP includes participation in the CIRP Freshman Survey and College Senior Survey, along with other direct and indirect assessments, to be able to document how strategies outlined in the QEP have affected student learning.

Faculty have also used the analyses to explore possible changes to the curriculum and programming. For example, in the First Year Experience CIRP Freshman Survey and Your First College Year results informed efforts to improve student writing, and the college is working to ensure students in different sections of first year seminars report similar levels of engagement, satisfaction and gains in writing skills. ■

Wake Forest University

Wake Forest University highlighted CIRP Freshman Survey results and College Senior Survey results in support of SACS Core requirement 2.5: establishing an institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation process that makes use of assessment for institutional effectiveness. The paper, "*Four Years Later: Qualitative and Quantitative Assessment of the Changes in the Class of 2001*" was one of the sources in the self-study and contained relevant results showing how Wake Forest students changed from the freshman to senior year. For example, Wake Forest found students demonstrated improvement in self-confidence, with 62% of seniors, compared to 52% of the same group as freshmen, reporting "above average or higher" self-confidence. On the other hand, the results also indicated that seniors had less contact socially with students from other races, with 71% of the freshmen reporting they had socialized with other racial/ethnic groups (during the last year in high school) compared with only 40% as seniors at Wake Forest. Recognizing that providing diversity has been a challenge, Wake Forest has used these revealing survey results to take a number of positive steps to improve interaction of students with students of other racial/ethnic groups. ■

> ***"Comparing CIRP Freshman Survey and College Senior Survey results is an outstanding assessment mechanism to determine how students have changed in multiple facets from the freshman to the senior year."***
>
> **—Ross Griffith**
> **Director of Institutional Research**
> **Wake Forest University**

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Santa Clara University

In preparing for its Educational Effectiveness Review, Santa Clara University, used matched CIRP Freshman Survey and College Senior Survey data to understand how its students' beliefs and actions align with the Catholic, Jesuit university's distinctive mission of educating for competence, conscience, and compassion. A longitudinal study of twelve survey items examined mission-related themes involving compassion, leadership for a just society, and respect for diversity. The analysis revealed that between the freshman and senior year students reported significant gains in the degree to which they value diverse cultures. It also revealed that students perceived compassion-related items, such as helping others in difficulty and participating in community action programs, to be significantly more important in their senior year than they did in their first year. Benchmarking data revealed that mission-related gains exceeded those at other private and four-year institutions. The analysis also showed, however, that despite appearing to value compassion more than they did as first year students, graduating seniors engaged in volunteer work less than they did when they came to Santa Clara.

Santa Clara also compared the findings from recent seniors with results from seniors ten years earlier, and found that, compared to the previous cohort, the more recent seniors said they valued compassion-related activities more highly, but engaged in volunteer work less frequently. Benchmark analysis revealed that this trend also extended beyond the Santa Clara campus to other private and four-year institutions.

At the same time that this analysis was underway Santa Clara implemented a Core (General Education) Curriculum focusing on educating students for "knowledge, habits of mind and heart, and engagement with the world." The Core includes requirements that directly address the findings related to the reported declines in volunteer work: an "Experiential Learning for Social Justice" requirement that provides students with opportunities to work directly with underserved communities, and a Civic Engagement requirement that can be fulfilled with public service internships. Embedded in the Core Curriculum is a multi-year plan for direct assessment of student work in each Core area.

Santa Clara is planning to replicate the analysis, pairing it with direct assessments of student learning in related areas of the curriculum. ■

HERI has developed guides which align CIRP survey results with specific regional accreditation standards.

http://www.heri.ucla.edu/accreditation