Academic Audit
Pellissippi State Community College Behavioral Sciences Department
March 31, 2015

Introduction

The academic audit of the Pellissippi State Community College (PSCC) Behavioral Sciences Department was conducted on March 31, 2015. Ted Stryk, Associate Professor of Philosophy and English at Roane State Community College, served as team leader. Chris Ayers, Department Chair and Associate Professor, Department of Kinesiology, Sport and Recreation at East Tennessee State University and Erskine Ausbrooks, Professor of Psychology at Dyersburg State Community College served as team members.

The team first met with college and program administrators including the Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Dean of Natural and Behavioral Sciences. During the second meeting, the team met with the fulltime faculty from the department. The third session was a meeting with students representing a cross-section of the courses and programs the department offers. The team then met with adjunct and co-curricular faculty. After a working lunch, the team met to complete the onsite checklist and performance funding checklist. All sessions were productive, and the auditors, faculty, and administrators met in the afternoon to discuss the commendations, affirmations, and recommendations the audit team had written. All parties agreed that the results were productive and useful.

Overall Results

The program seemed well prepared. There was a consistent focus on implementing assessment, which had in the past been present to varying degrees in component fields within the department. The department itself is new, so plans for department wide consistency in objective and assessment are understandably in their infancy. At the same time, proper care was taken to preserve the academic freedom of the individual instructors to innovate and gear their approach to the various constituencies of students. Many of the assessment measures are very new, so utilization of results is in its early stages. There was a focus on being available to students, which was readily evident when we spoke to students who praised the availability and helpfulness of department faculty. All relevant items on the performance funding checklist were checked as “met.”

Focal Area 1: Learning Objectives

Students and faculty seemed well aware of the learning objectives, which were prominently featured in syllabi. All objectives are presently under revision, as they were produced prior to the creation of the department. The new objectives for each course will be organized into
categories pertaining to values, skills, and goals to help students understand the purpose of each objective. They are also being modified based on needs relating to fitting courses into the new Tennessee Transfer Pathways.

The entire faculty seems to be involved in collaborating to create and revise course goals. Much of the work in Physical Education was done in 2008 for a program review and again in 2010 in preparation for SACSOC reaccreditation. Some other departments are not as far along in the process, but clear progress is being made.

In addition to being printed on the syllabus, course objectives are reviewed during the first session of every class. In addition, the objectives are available on the master syllabi, which are available on the curriculum website.

Based on survey of alumni graduating between 2007-2012, the overwhelming majority of students consider their academic preparation for further study at another college or university as “good” or “excellent.” More data is being collected at the present to assess how transfer students fair.

**Focal Area 2: Curriculum and Co-curriculum**

Curriculum and co-curriculum decisions at PSCC have demonstrated a thorough and candid analysis in their academic audit of the extent to which they collaborate now and propose a continuous process of improvement for the future to effectively design innovations in curriculum and co-curriculum practices. A review of the syllabi sampled regularly demonstrated attention and taking action to describe, detail and achieve program learning objectives. The faculty is committed to and has documented actions to implement best practices to advance their curriculum and co-curriculum. Examples are:

- Students enthusiastically complimented the accessibility and helpfulness of faculty both in and outside the classroom to make student success both here at PSCC during their college years and beyond in their careers a top priority;
- Master syllabi are periodically and continuously reviewed by the deans, faculty, and Curriculum Development Committee in insure updates in learning outcomes and orderly processes of change;
- If course goals or expected student leaning outcomes change, the syllabus has to returned to the CDC for review;
- Lead instructors ensure that courses are designed to meet the internal requirements of the college and external guidelines of professional organizations like the American Psychological Association as well as transfer colleges and universities;
- Instruction is very D2L driven to increase accessibility of students to teachers, learning experiences, and each other;
- Where prerequisites are deemed a foundational necessity decisions are made by faculty conjointly in consultation with the dean;
A special eye of consideration is regularly influenced by decisions implemented by The Tennessee Transfer Pathway Program;

The faculty is dedicated to “internationalizing the curriculum” ---- one example of which is participating with the Tennessee Consortium for International Studies, there Health and Physical Education, Spanish, and Anthropology classes taught in study abroad formats;

Service Learning is emphasized in curriculum planning for multiple classes such as College Success, Psychology of Human Development, Lifespan Psychology, and Anthropology;

Assignments in Anthropology classes are tied to primate observations at the local Knoxville Zoo and field trips are taken to active archaeological excavations in Knoxville areas. Students affirmed these active hands-on experience brought class room learning to life for them;

There is a “Behavioral Psychology” class that some students reported was more than an academic learning experience but became a personal and professional enrichment experience that changed them positively in their outlooks on life;

College Success classes encourage students as a major part of their course grade requirement to develop professional career plans as well as have the opportunity for job shadowing and interviewing professionals in the field;

Physical Education fitness-based courses require that students maintain fitness journals, activity logs, and food diaries. Journaling is a widely recognized therapeutic best practice on many levels psychologically and academically. Further students in sport-based courses receive extra credit for participation in intramural activities, sports clubs, fitness events, as well as spectatrors events which can boost attendance and support of sporting events;

Psychology students in Blount County are able to attend community training on the prevention of child abuse based on partnership between the New Hope of Blount County Program and PSCC which demonstrates excellent co-curriculum connection with community resources and needs;

The library, known as the “Educational Resource Center” (ERC), is complemented by students and faculty alike for collecting extensive resources as well as targeting excellent customer service to those who rely upon them;

The college has developed a common reader program whereby under the umbrella organization of The College Common Academic Experience a book is chosen each year for faculty, administration, staff, and students to read. Speakers are invited to campus to further support awareness of the significant issues. A recent example was The Geography of Bliss by Eric Weiner and presentations of “The Best You Can” by speaker Marcus Engle and “Finding Hope for All the Wrong Reasons” by New York Times best-selling author Gwen Cooper; and

The faculty led Student Success Coordinator mentors program who work with faculty, students, and staff to identify students who are at risk and connect them with resources
that can help address the issues they are facing by establishing one-on-one contact with PSCC first-year students that are at high risk for dropping out.

These are examples of instances that PSCC is committed to building a highly commendable climate for a continuous process of improvement in learning, increasing graduation, and building student success in and out of the classroom.

**Focal Area 3: Teaching and Learning**

The audit committee found the faculty and adjunct faculty uses Desire to Learn (D2L) to effectively teach their classes. Faculty and adjunct faculty indicated the ERC was a useful resource. The ERC regularly provides D2L workshops that are of great assistance, particularly to new faculty and adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty expressed their appreciation for the value of the D2L in-service training that was provided for them by ERC prior to their first teaching assignment. They also indicated the Instructor Café was of great assistance in planning and conducting their classes. Faculty affirmed the use of IPad and laptop carts in the classrooms was very helpful for instruction within their classes. The use of technology for instruction is present at all levels and it is apparent that both faculty and students take advantage of the technological opportunities. The only apparent negative issue that came to light regarding the use of technology for teaching and learning was students felt *MyPsychLab* was not a useful online tool and was not worth the financial investment.

It is evident faculty effectively utilize the educational settings used for instruction. This includes classrooms on all campuses, as well as, physical education faculty’s effective use of gymnasium and outdoor activity areas. Though the audit team did not tour the Magnolia campus, faculty indicated the workout room on this campus could be made “more inviting” in physical appearance.

Faculty and students shared examples of how students are afforded opportunities for hands-on learning experiences. Students in anthropology classes have access to manipulatives in the form of casts of fossil human skulls and tools. Students are also exposed to activities including creation of primitive technology including stone tools, pottery, and spear throwing. Students in physical education classes experience the use of heart rate monitors to track their progress in physical conditioning. Guest speakers are also used within the programs of instruction and students expressed they valued off campus field experiences made available by faculty.

Evaluation of teaching was evaluated predominately via a Self-Evaluation Report and is now expanded with the new dean reinstating formal evaluative observations in the fall 2014 semester. Students expressed confidence in the faculty and respect for their teaching abilities. Students indicated communication with faculty was “second to none.”
Focal Area 4: Student Learning Assessment

Student learning is assessed primarily via written tests and writing assignments. Students confirmed that course content, exams, and assignments were in alignment with course syllabi. Students also confirmed exams were reflective of the content of the material provided by their instructors. Physical education instructors sometimes incorporate the use of skills tests for assessment of student learning.

The department reports its assessment of student learning ongoing, but not all disciplines within the unit consistently participate in the College’s annual planning and evaluation process. The department plans to develop a set of measureable outcomes for improved and continued assessment.

The audit committee finds that some programs within the department have strong existing assessment programs and the department is striving to develop a more systematic mechanism for student learning assessment. The department uses student grades as an indicator of student success using the marker of “C or better” as an indicator of success. It is notable that the alumni surveyed indicate that the college does a good job in preparing students for continuing their studies.

Focal Area 5: Quality Assurance

Pellissippi State Community College has set up quality assurance assessment design plans that are designed to be continuous and progress is being tracked. Both qualitative and quantitative data are collected as mentioned on page 3. Actions described on page 7 are commendable to meet student needs and use student interests as a guiding force for improvement in the quality and design of courses provided to students. There is a commendable collaborative process in the Department of Natural and Behavioral Sciences among the disciplines to continuously improve quality assurance. An example is that the curriculum design for the College Student Success Course (COLL 1500) was made and is taught by faculty from across the College and input from faculty in other disciplines is readily available and regularly incorporated. Another example is that decisions regarding new course development were made with input from students, faculty, The Dean, the Director of Curriculum and New Program Development, and external sources when applicable. These recent innovations have produced:

- Introduction to Kinesiology (PHED 1005) and Prevention & Care of Athletic Injuries (PHED 2335) both of which are designed to meet Tennessee Transfer Pathway curriculum requirements;
- Introduction to Snowboarding (PHES 1080) and Intermediate Volleyball (PHED 2610) which were implemented in response to student interest; and
- Biological Basis for Behavior (PSYCC 2220) which was redesigned to address growing interest in neuroscience, expand course offerings in Psychology, and help students meet new requirements for the Medical School Aptitude Test.
There is evidence of actions to align course plans with receiving institutions listed at the bottom of page 5 which is evidence of careful long range planning. Participation in TNCIS is commendable to internationalize the curriculum as described at the top and bottom of page 8. The procedures for faculty evaluations mentioned on page 13 seem practical and feasible. The Dean’s commitment is extremely admirable to fulfill future budget demands for professional development of each faculty member within the next five years to advance quality assurance of continuously improved instructional preparedness.

This is the first academic audit for the Behavioral Sciences unit. The faculty self-reports that they have used the audit process “as a vehicle for learning about the other disciplines in the unit and learning to work together.” A new Dean joined the department in the summer of 2014 whose stated goal among others is “to increase collaboration and communication within the unit.” This focus on continuously improving communications within the unit is commendable and exceptionable as busy as all those involved are! All full-time faculty representing anthropology, college success, physical education, and psychology participated in the audit process which demonstrates a wide support and involvement in quality assurance.

Further still, the faculty is recognized as key to quality assurance. There is evident commitment to peer evaluation of class instructional practices. The peer evaluation plan demonstrates a team approach to instructional assessment for advancing quality assurance that is feasible, practical, and simultaneously very faculty friendly.

“Building a Culture of Assessment” on the PSCC campus is seriously evident with practices the Dean and Faculty have in place now and plans to be implemented in the future. Building such a culture is highly labor intensive work and there is widespread involvement at this stage among both administration and faculty to adopt a compliance assist model that will serve all involved well. The Dean has done a great deal in his short time at PSCC to promote a culture of assessment on campus in the mind set to set plans in motion for assessment to insure quality that are practical, feasible, realistic, and authentic in in direction and action.

**Commendations**

Commendation #1 – Extensive use of the Instructor’s Café is common practice, allowing for active communication and coordination among faculty.

Commendation #2 – The ERC has extensive resources and is very helpful and accessible for students and faculty.

Commendation #3 – The entire department seems to be aware of and is actively involved in decisions related to assessment and curriculum.

Commendation #4 – The faculty regularly explore ways to internationalize the curriculum (for example, emphasis on TNCIS).

Commendation #5 – The D2L and other technology support for both full and part time faculty is extensive and most faculty seem very complimentary of the support and training provided, including adjuncts who have been asked to teach at short notice.

Commendation #6 – The students universally affirmed the accessibility and helpfulness of the faculty. They stressed that the faculty make student success, both here at Pellissippi and beyond, a top priority.
Affirmations

Affirmation #1 – The recently-acquired iPad and laptop carts appear to be very useful, although they are not available in all areas, and it is of course too soon to have quantitative data on this.

Affirmation #2 – We affirm the development of assessable learning outcomes and sorting them into objectives pertaining to values, skills, and goals.

Affirmation #3 – We affirm the plans to, once outcomes are developed, conduct assessment based on those outcomes and use the data derived from such assessment to achieve improved student learning.

Affirmation #4 – We affirm the plan to give more financial support if available to fund workshops, conference travel, and training.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1 – It is strongly recommended that the department reevaluates its use of MyPsychLab. Students indicated that it little used, costly, and when it is used, it is buggy and is used for purposes (such as quizzes) that could be done within D2L.

Recommendation #2 – It is recommended that the department look into finding more private space for part time and some full time faculty to meet with students. While space is of course limited, several faculty members voiced concern about having to discuss confidential matters within earshot of others. This could be a FERPA issue.

Recommendation #3 – It is recommended that effort be made to implement a cohesive program of assessment within the department in which all disciplines participate.

Recommendation #4 – Students indicated that their advisors were often in different programs than their major and were unaware of degree and transfer requirements. While this is not entirely under the control of the department, it is helpful when program faculty help students in this area and more emphasis may be needed here.