

**Analysis of HLC Comprehensive Visit Final Report  
Criteria Three & Four and  
Recommendations of Promising Actions  
Assessment Resource Team, Antioch University**

In April 2014 the Antioch University Assessment Resource Team (ART) convened with AU Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Iris Weisman, to review the recent Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Comprehensive Visit Final Report and to make recommendations for promising actions. We gave special attention to *Criterion Three Teaching & Learning: Quality, Resources and Support* and *Criterion Four Teaching & Learning: Evaluation and Improvement*. Our meeting coincided with the HLC Annual Conference where several of our team members and other Antioch colleagues offered conference presentations.

**I. HLC Report Analysis**

ART's analysis of the HLC Final Report was informed by the AU self-study, our participation in the HLC conference, the recent AU faculty convocation, and our collective knowledge of the university campuses and programs. Building on the work of Hersh & Keeling (2013), the essential question that guided us was: How can we use the HLC report, our knowledge, and our experience to help students learn, improve programs and add value to the AU culture of academic assessment?

We began with a text-based analysis of the HLC report noting AU strengths and areas needing attention as identified by the HLC review team, as well as themes that recurred in the HLC report. As we conducted the analysis we also acknowledged AU initiatives already in place and identified promising actions for AU to pursue. Overall, ART focused on aspects in the HLC report pertaining to curriculum and assessment. There are other matters addressed in Criterion Three and Four that will be of interest for other university committees.

**II. Evidence of Strength & Areas Needing Attention**

The HLC report highlighted areas of strength and elements in need of attention related to academic assessment:

Strengths and Progress

- There is faculty ownership of curriculum through campus and program committees.
- Academic programs have established student learning outcomes.
- An annual program review policy and process is in place with multiple measures of assessment being used, including rubrics for narrative evaluation.

- Coordination of assessment planning efforts have been enhanced via the work of the Assessment Resource Team.
- Programs with external accreditation are in compliance with professional standards and benchmarks.

#### In Need of Attention

- Clarity about how program level student learning outcomes are linked to the institutional mission.
- Evidence of direct student learning measures and closing the loop between academic assessment and decision-making.
- Centralized institutional research efforts including, tracking of graduate success,
- Improved adjunct faculty orientation to ensure instructional quality.
- Enhanced university-wide academic strategic planning.

There is an overall sense in the report that HLC would like to see more consistency across campuses, particularly in the areas of shared learning outcomes, faculty development, and institutional research.

It is good that the HLC recognized the progress that has been made at AU since the last self-study and we value their impressions, recognizing many of their insights as ones discussed at ART meetings and in other institutional contexts. We have experienced AU as an institution with a culture of informed decision-making within programs but still developing a knowledge and understanding of academic assessment as it is emerging in the field of higher education.

In the few days that the review team had to get to know AU, its programs and its culture, it is unrealistic to expect them to see the whole picture. For example, the report identifies a need for more evidence of direct measures of student learning, in spite of many examples articulated in the Program Profiles prepared for the self-study. This highlights a theme identified by ART through this analysis, that is, despite a strong overall presentation of AU in the self-study, **AU can benefit by telling the story of how we know that our students acquire the knowledge, skills, and capacities they need to fulfill the Antioch mission in the larger world.** This can be accomplished by articulating for ourselves, and others, what makes an Antioch education both distinctive and effective.

### **III. Ongoing & New Initiatives**

It was heartening to recognize that as a result of the work in the Red and Blue Book Committees, the University Academic Council, Council of Chief Academic Officers, as well as university and campus level offices of Academic Affairs, and the self-study teams, there are many initiatives already in place, pre-dating the report that address HLC concerns, including:

- Cross-campus program comparability efforts,
- Prior learning assessment with the Council for Adult & Experiential Learning,
- Enrollment in the HLC Persistence and Completion Academy,

- Ongoing development for a cross-campus Doctorate of Education degree program,
- Enactment of the University Academic Council,
- Examination by ART of rubric use across AU programs, and the
- Recent faculty convocation leading to academic strategic planning.

There was a consensus among the ART members that AU as an institution must take seriously the observations of our colleagues on the HLC review team. We should not allow the insights gained through the self-study and review process to languish until the next accreditation cycle, rather, the review recommendations should inform both the short and long range strategic planning of university faculty and administrators. That said, there was also an abiding sense among ART that AU history and culture places our institution on the progressive edges of higher education. That positioning may result in an ongoing creative tension between AU and peer review accreditation teams that can serve to inspire us to continually hone our practice and contribute to the field of higher education.

In general, the theme identified through the text analysis of the HLC report, that is, “telling the story of how we know that our students acquire the knowledge, skills, and capacities they need to fulfill the Antioch mission in the larger world” speaks to the necessity for more clearly articulating what it means to be one university, making more evident the ways assessment relates to our institutional identity and mission, and building intra and inter-campus networks.

ART recommends the following promising actions to be taken up by ART, the UAC, CCAOs, offices of Academic Affairs, and other university bodies:

1. Utilize campus-based faculty teams and ART members to: Identify university-wide liberal learning goals and program-level assessment strategies.
2. Develop Academic Assessment Web Pages: Articulate the AU vision of academic assessment and provide resources for faculty and programs.
3. Build Intra and Inter-institutional Networks: Provide increased opportunities to share ideas and strategies about teaching, learning, and assessment.

As a result of the good work of the UAC and recent faculty convocation there is a renewed sense among AU faculty of the benefit of collective action and of highlighting our commonalities and distinctiveness. Nothing builds community better than doing meaningful work together. Collectively defining how we live our mission has the potential to engage and energize faculty in a way that is intellectually interesting and important to the institution.

It is essential that, while we respond to the HLC report and develop our sense of institutional identity, we also honor our unique campuses and programs. The AU academic system will be strengthened through a common understanding of our

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mission while continuing to foster program diversity to serve our very different regional populations. Implementation of the recommendations above will address the concerns of our HLC colleagues and contribute to helping our students learn, improving our programs, and adding value to the AU culture of teaching, learning and assessment.

Respectfully submitted by the AU Assessment Resource Team,

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Reference

Hersh, R.H. & Keeling, R.P. (2013). *Changing Institutional Culture to Promote Assessment of Higher Learning*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.

<http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/occasionalpapers.htm>.