

Higher Learning Commission
Report of a Comprehensive Evaluation Visit-Assurance Section
Summary of areas that need to be addressed.
May 11-13, 2009

1. The team found that there was not the typical statement in the self-study that asked for the accreditation to be extended for a certain period of years.
2. The team would have appreciated receiving more materials electronically ahead of time.
3. The team did not find that a consistent general education core has been incorporated into its degree and certificate programs.
4. The team found that despite the presence of an assessment plan, progress made as of 2005 in implementing a college wide assessment program appears to have been eroded by significant turnover in administration and faculty.
5. The team found that in the notification of the Evaluation Visit and Solicitation of Third-Party Comment there was no comment solicited through the college website.
6. The team had difficulty finding documentation in meeting minutes in relation to issues referenced during the visit. College leadership agreed that the decision making process was handled informally and that it is important for more formal processes to be put in place to document the status of discussion items and initiatives and to bring issues to closure.
7. The team found that the college needs to develop contingency plans, such as a rainy day fund, funds for repair and rehabilitation, deferred maintenance, meeting ADA requirements, and equipment replacement plans.
8. The institution must be readily able to provide and utilize audited financial statements consistent with higher education practices.
9. The team said that although NCTA had developed a strategic long-range plan, operational planning is uneven across the departments of the institution. The team viewed plans for maintenance, technology, and the library but the relationship of these plans to other areas such as academic, financial and human resources planning is not clear.
10. The college should implement needs analysis to support academic planning. The team noted that key program planning initiatives listed in the 2001-2006 Strategic Plan were apparently abandoned and those listed in the 2008-2013 Strategic Plan are quite different.
11. The institution needs to develop systems for ensuring accurate and timely data collection to inform decision-making.
12. The currently informal links between mission, planning, and budgeting need to be formalized, documented, and communicated to constituencies.
13. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizations attention. Faculty loading should be reviewed, especially in light of the administrative loads that some carry:
 - a. Faculty, including division chairs, customarily teach 20-30 contact hours per week.

- b. No extra compensation is provided except to those chairs or faculty, who develop and deliver courses to concurrently enrolled students at partner high schools, which require hours beyond those listed above.
 - c. Typical semester course loads for students are also very high. Loads of 6-7 courses, 18-20 credit hours, and 25-30 contact hours are common creating a problematic situation given the low level of academic skills and abilities of a high percentage of incoming students. In addition, the total credit hours required for graduation are high. The curriculum requirements for associate degrees as listed in the College Catalogue exceed 70 credit hours for many programs and range as high as 80. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect even well-prepared students to complete an associate degree program in two years.
 - d. Neither the college catalog nor the student handbook contains a clear statement regarding the college's expectations for general education. There is no consistency in expectations among the programs.
14. Interviews with faculty, administrators, and Assessment Committee members verify that the assessment process has been poorly monitored and enforced in recent years, has not been effectively integrated into continuous improvement efforts at the College to improve student learning, and has not been extended to all educational offerings. As indicated in the statement on assessment in the HLC handbook, assessment should be integrated into "the organization's processes for program review"
15. The team did not find evidence of general education assessment at the course level or institutional level.
16. The team found no published means by which assessment results are shared with students or other constituencies.
17. The team found little evidence of systematic analysis and use of assessment results.
18. The team found that although there are University of Nebraska policies on intellectual property rights and academic freedom, these statements do not appear in student or faculty handbooks nor in the NCTA catalog.
19. The team found that NCTA has not formalized a system for compiling, analyzing, and distributing graduate, alumni, and employer survey results to key college constituencies.
20. The team found that NCTA has not yet demonstrated a strong commitment to, or understanding of, general education.
- a. Faculty should regularly assess its effectiveness against the organization's stated goals for student learning.
21. The team found that the general education component at NCTA does not adequately meet those criteria.
- a. Some courses that are not general education, such as internship, and excludes others that are, such as mathematics and science. In addition, a developmental math course (mislabeled with the title College Math) is counted for graduation credit for all programs in the Agricultural Production Systems Division.
22. Conditions of Affiliation
- a. Stipulation on affiliation status-None.
 - b. Approval of degree sites-Prior commission approval required-no change.

- c. Approval of distance education degree-Prior Commission approval required-no change.
- d. Reports required
 - i. No Reports Required

23. Other visits scheduled

- a. Focus visit on General Education, Assessment, and the link between planning and budgeting.-The visit will be in fall semester 2012.
- b. The visit will cover three important topics: Assessment, General Education, and the link between planning and budgeting. The team expects that the institution will take these elements into consideration and incorporate them into their strategic planning for the futures as part of the preparation for the recommended focus visit.

24. Assessment

- a. The college needs to provide evidence that its assessment activities have been integrated into a cohesive plan that includes the following: the assignment of assessment responsibilities to an individual or committee that will continuously monitor and report on assessment results; the analysis of those results. The college should, by the time of the visit, be able to more readily access and analyze its own data better as a result of the system wide adoption of new data collection and management systems. The college should have an institution-wide conversation about how to develop a “culture of assessment” and a “culture of evidence” that is necessary in order to substantively integrate assessment into the life of NCTA.

25. General Education

- a. The team expects NCTA to identify the core concepts and expected outcomes of the general education courses associated with each curriculum and to communicate those appropriately to the students.
- b. What may be more difficult, but just as important, is to educate all faculty to the value of general education and the important and relevant skills it develops in students to appropriate to the mission of NCTA.

26. Link between Planning and Budgeting

- a. The team expects NCTA to develop a more clear link between planning and budgeting in future iterations of its strategic plans and in its operationalization of that plan.
- b. There is not an environmental scanning process that can inform strategies the institution can build to help in the preservation of the rural culture through its programs and services.

27. Organization change request

- a. The team is in support of the Veterinary Technology Comparative Medicine Option delivered at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha however, the financial resources for this option are not currently available. The team recommends that, at such time in the future when the financial resources become available, the college submit t NCTA’s HLC staff liaison a contingency report that will provide a clear business plan and documentation of available

funding. At that time, the staff liaison will review and make a recommendation about possible approval.

28. Request for HLC approval to move the Horticulture Program from the NCTA Curtis campus to the West Central Research and Extension Center located in North Platte, Nebraska.
 - a. The team does not recommend approval of the request to relocate the Horticulture Program to North Platte. The team suggests an alternate solution for the college to consider. The recommended alternative suggested is this: while the program remains in total at NCTA, the 30 credit hour certificate portion of the program could be offered at North Platte. To make the outreach possible, it will be necessary for the college to seek approval from the federal Department of Education to extend Title IV financial aid eligibility to North Platte by reporting the North Platte site as a location where a certificate program is available. In addition, the Higher Learning Commission would need to approve the certificate program at the North Platte location as prior approval is required as a condition of the Statement of Affiliation Status.
29. Request for HLC approval to deliver the NCTA Veterinary Technology Associate of Applied Science degree program through online technologies augmented by laboratory experiences under the direction of veterinarians.
 - a. There has not yet been planning for appropriate student support services typical of those that support online programs.