



UWSP Accreditation

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 of Colleges and Schools



Criterion Four:

Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge

By Patti Becker, with contributions by Richard Ruppel, Karlene Ferrante, and Rosanne Proite

Take a few moments to ponder the question, “What separates an organization of higher learning from a postsecondary training institute?” How would you answer? In its Handbook of Accreditation, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) poses this intriguing question in the introduction to Criterion Four on the Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge. It gets at the answer by claiming that “it is not the range and types of educational programs offered, nor the duration of those programs.” Perhaps surprisingly, HLC states that the educational pathways of students in these two different types of postsecondary educational institutions contain “remarkable similarities in the skills the programs are meant to develop.”

So what separates – or should separate – UWSP from a postsecondary training institute? According to HLC, the answer to this question has to do with what it means to be “an educated person.” Rather than imparting employable skills as an end in itself, an institution of higher education also seeks to help students become “independently creative” persons who are “informed and dependable” and “socially aware and responsible” citizens. In today’s knowledge-based economy, it is not only important to be technologically savvy, it is imperative to be able to sort through masses of information in order to create meaning and apply knowledge in a complex, changing world. In other words, institutions of higher education should prepare students to be lifelong learners.

When HLC examines UWSP for reaccreditation they will be looking for evidence that the university “promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.” This article will outline the four components that make up criterion four as they relate to UWSP.

Component Four A: The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.

UWSP’s commitment to a life of learning is clear from the select goal and responsibility of the university to “provide a broad foundation of liberal studies” to impart “the heritage of human civilization, critical intelligence, and the skills necessary for a lifetime of learning.” Indeed, the theme of UWSP’s reaccreditation reminds us that “It’s all about learning.” UWSP promotes a life of learning for its community through documents articulating its commitment to intellectual freedom and freedom of inquiry in the classroom, in research and publication, and as private citizens. UWSP provides financial and other support for research and for professional development; faculty and students produce scholarship and create knowledge; and the university publicly acknowledges the achievements of faculty and staff. In these ways members of the UWSP community live the life of learning.

Component Four B: The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.

UWSP has identified skills and knowledges that the faculty believe ought to be part of every student's education. The general education program known as the General Degree Requirements (GDRs) seeks to provide all undergraduates with a broad interdisciplinary liberal arts-oriented experience that will complement their majors while promoting the interconnectedness of disciplines and encouraging life-long learning. The university is in the process of working on the design of direct assessment instruments that will measure and evaluate the skills and knowledges taught in general education courses. UWSP also provides a plethora of co-curricular activities to integrate learning outside the classroom.

Component Four C: The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.

UWSP students have numerous opportunities to become comfortable living and working in a multicultural world; to participate in an array of intercultural and international learning experiences that will enable them to live as citizens of the world and stewards of the earth; and to take advantage of ongoing technological change in all aspects of life. An array of assessments provides evidence that students appreciate such learning experiences at UWSP.

Component Four D: The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

The UWSP Community Bill of Rights and Responsibilities and the accompanying policies and procedures, as outlined in the "Community Rights and Responsibilities Handbook," delineate the expectations made of all members of the campus community that the university shall be a safe and welcoming place in which to acquire and apply knowledge – both inside and outside of the classroom – in a responsible manner. The handbook also promulgates UW System policies regarding academic (and non-academic) standards. Other means of ensuring responsible scholarship include the provision of guidelines and training, the use of committees to review research protocols and oversee campus research involving human and animal subjects, and by providing guidance on copyright matters.

The foregoing is only an overview of the many and varied ways that UWSP relates to the HLC criterion four components. The accreditation self-study will examine these and the other criteria and their components in greater detail, and the virtual resource room is filled with documents, websites, and other materials. Evidence of how UWSP fosters an environment of lifelong learning is all around us.

TIMELINE FOR RE-ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Fall 2006

Criterion Task Forces request supporting documents from all UWSP departments

Summer 2007

Draft of Self-study is available for review and comment

Spring 2008

UWSP site visit of Evaluation Team

Spring 2007

Steering committee analyzes information; prepares, completes studies, and prepares rough draft of self-study report

Fall 2007

Final draft of Self-study is completed and sent to the Higher Learning Commission for review.



Updates on the Strategic Planning Process

By Bob Mosier, Co-coordinator of Accreditation Steering Committee

Building on the past two years of work of "Vision 2015", under the leadership of Chancellor Bunnell, UWSP began a campus-wide strategic planning process in the spring 2007 semester. "Vision 2015" is the foundation for the current strategic planning process. Virginia Helm appointed Anna Haines and Bob Mosier as co-coordinators of the strategic planning effort. Provost Helm developed a Strategic Planning Organizing Committee to coordinate this process, consisting of herself, Bob Mosier, Anna Haines, and Chris Sadler.

The Strategic Planning Organizing Committee developed four planning sessions to be held off-campus during second semester. Mark Hilliker, from the Portage County Extension Office, agreed to facilitate the sessions. The first three strategic planning sessions were held during the month of March. There were 28 planning session participants, representing a cross section of campus involvement. They included representatives from the Faculty Senate, Student Government, Accreditation Steering Committee, Academic Staff Council, faculty, the community, Classified Staff, the local union, and others.

These three sessions in March produced a draft SWOT analysis, a draft mission statement, a draft values statement, and a structure for an on-going strategic planning process. After the March planning sessions, a review group, chaired by Joan North, was asked to solicit responses to the draft mission and values statements. Drafts were distributed widely and were available on a strategic planning website.

During the fourth session in April, the planning group reviewed the campus responses to the proposed mission and values statements, revised the mission and values statements based on that feedback, and developed a model for the strategic planning process to be implemented next year. The Strategic Planning Organizing Committee asked for feedback from the campus on these proposed plans in May.

The results of the spring 2007 semester's work will be forwarded to the Academic Affairs Committee, which will review the campus mission and values statements first thing in the fall 2007. After they have given it their full consideration, they will make recommendations to the Faculty Senate. The strategic planning model, which was approved by the planning session participants, will be discussed by the line officers and various campus constituencies, including governance. Thus, the strategic planning process will continue in the fall.

"We are very interested in your reactions and feedback. Whether you are impressed with the activities on campus (as we were while researching the report) or you find errors or omissions, we want to know what you think."

Accreditation Steering Committee



Tell us what you think!

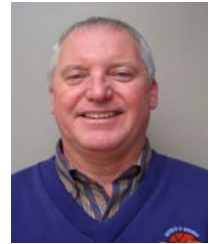
We are pleased to invite members of the campus community to review the draft of the Self-Study Report for Accreditation. The report is available online at <http://www.uwsp.edu/accreditation/selfstudy.aspx> and may be downloaded as individual chapters and appendices. You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view the material.

We are very interested in your reactions and feedback. Whether you are impressed with the activities on campus (as we were while researching the report) or you find errors or omissions, we want to know what you think. You may provide anonymous feedback through a link on the web page listed above; all we ask is that you identify your role on campus so that we can know where the feedback is coming from.

Thank you all for your efforts on campus...it's the people that make UWSP the high quality institution that it is!

Community Perspective

By Don Peters, member of Self-Study Steering Committee



Don Peters

When asked to join the steering committee I thought I knew a lot about the university and its interaction with the community. I have found there is much more to the list of activities and educational opportunities than I was aware. UWSP adds flavor and a dynamic to our community beyond what many know. Many on campus have contributed to the self assessment or audit of activities as the accreditation process requires. This activity has captured a large list of how the University delivers many opportunities for students and our neighbors to enrich their lives.

As a former banker I recognize many aspects of the accreditation process to be similar to a bank examination. A third party group of subject matter experts drills down into how well the institution is serving its constituents and compares those actions with best practices across the industry. The Higher Learning Commission, like the bank examiners, also sets benchmarks for planning, leadership, and assessment of outcomes in order to best evaluate the school's effectiveness in delivering the best student experience possible. Many good things happen at UWSP that attain these benchmarks, and there are also those aspects that need attention and integration into the day to day governance and operations.

This is a good process when UWSP associates understand, embrace, and implement those findings. There are many great things happening on campus and there is high potential to build on those. Good luck!

Got Room?

As the Accreditation Steering Committee prepares for the arrival of the HLC Site Visit Team, we are working to secure rooms for the many various meetings that will be happening throughout their three-day visit (March 31-April 2, 2008). If you have a space within your department or office area that you think would be conducive for a meeting and you would be willing to share that space, please contact Wayne Sorenson at x4069 or wsorenso@uwsp.edu. We would appreciate any support and assistance you can give as we try to coordinate all the meeting locations and logistics.



Photo by Doug Moore



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For more information: <http://www.uwsp.edu/accreditation> or Accreditation.Steering.Committee@uwsp.edu

