



Tennessee Board of Regents

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MEMORANDUM

To: Chief Academic Officers

From: Paula Myrick Short, Ph.D. *Paula*
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Re: Academic Audit Reports

Date: June 7, 2005

I have enclosed the reports of the Academic Audit site teams for the Audit pilot programs on your campuses. I have reviewed the reports as has Dr. Bill Massy and am impressed with the quality of the work of both the Audit teams as well as the campus programs being visited. Please distributed the reports to your respective programs and indicate my appreciation to the chairs and faculty for their involvement in the process.

I hope each of you plan to attend the June 23 session. This will provide an opportunity to discuss the year long pilot and plans for continuing the Academic Audit. Please let me know if you have any questions.

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The Tennessee Technology Centers

Academic Audit Site Visit Report

Roane State Community College
English Program
April 20, 2005

Auditors:

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Introduction

As part of the academic audit program sponsored by Tennessee Board of Regents, a four-member audit team conducted its on-site visit to the English Program on April 20, 2005, on the main campus of Roane State Community College located in Harriman, Tennessee. The audit team followed a pre-developed visit agenda and spent quality time carrying out dialogs and conversations with students, faculty, and administration from the college. Following a brief plenary session to kick off the visit, the team conducted a forty-five minute discussion session with a group of students that represented a wide range of programs and degree concentrations offered at Roane State. The English faculty, fulltime and part time, were able to meet with the team in two separate sessions, for a total of an hour and forty-five minutes. Likewise, the audit team had an opportunity to meet the college's top administrators. The academic audit site visit concluded with an executive session with faculty and administration present.

Overall Performance

The English Department at Roane State Community College is part of the Humanities Division and employs sixteen fulltime faculty members and approximately sixty adjunct faculty. The dean of the division serves as the department head and is also a teaching member of the department. English classes are offered on eight different campuses which spread over a wide geographic area of eight counties in two time zones. Curriculum wise, the English Department offers a variety of courses ranging from basic and developmental courses to college level writing and literature courses. Designed to serve a dual purpose, the department assists students enrolled at Roane State to meet their major or general education core requirements.

There is clear evidence that the English Department at Roane State Community College is comprised of able and dedicated professionals who are working under difficult conditions at times given the constraints created by the number of campuses and adjuncts required to staff those campuses. The team finds that Roane State's English program has a focused and coherent curriculum with a clearly identified core of learning objectives and outcomes. Faculty in the department share a strong sense of quality and improvement and are clearly student learning oriented. Due to concerted efforts and individual contributions, the English program at Roane State demonstrates several identifiable strengths. One area of strength is the development and implementation of a writing center which was later changed to a learning center with an expanded scope due to the success of the writing center. Such a learning center has been duplicated on other campuses and serves a strong purpose of supporting the curriculum and assisting students with their learning. The centers are frequently used by students and are highly effective, according to the students at the site visit interview. The team also finds a well developed and implemented adjunct management system which plays a critical role in the process of quality control given the number of adjunct faculty the department has to employ.

Student learning is occurring as evidenced during the interview with the students, and students demonstrated impressive knowledge and skills with a clear sense of application.

Although faculty are devoted to quality and continuous improvement of teaching and learning, the team notes that such efforts are largely on the individual level. As observed in the self-study report, the English faculty recognize the need to strengthen communication and collaboration within the department in the course of improving student learning. It appears that efforts to plan and formalize initiatives for continuous evaluation and improvements could be beneficial, and development of formal quality assurance processes at the departmental level is necessary as the department strives for quality and excellence in student learning.

The academic audit team applauds the efforts that faculty in the English Department are making towards quality assurance. The team is delighted to find that faculty have already undertaken some of the initiatives identified during the process of self-study for the academic audit. One of the initiatives is to overcome the barriers of time and distance created by the multiplicity of campuses. A "virtual meeting place" on WebCT is proposed in the self-study report to improve collaboration and communication among faculty. At the visit, the team finds the WebCT virtual meeting system has already been set up running, and faculty indicate that such a mechanism can be an effective and viable way of communication and collaboration when face-to-face meetings are out of the question due to the above mentioned constraints. The team believes that with this and other similar efforts and initiatives, the English Department is well on its way of establishing and strengthening a culture of quality and continuous improvement to achieve quality student learning outcomes.

Performance in Focal Areas

Focal Area One: Learning Objectives

Maturity Assessment: 3—Emergent Efforts

The team finds that efforts of faculty in the English Department at Roane State Community College are characterized, in general, at the "emergent effort level" in relation to learning objectives. At such a level, initiatives are largely individual, and experimentations are being carried out with the quality principles. It is evident that faculty of the English Department have a strong sense of students' learning needs, and efforts are constantly being made in identifying and serving the learning needs at the individual level. The team, on the other hand, recognizes the department's organized effort when the English faculty collaborated on the determination of the learning objectives at one point. As indicated in the self-study report, several years ago faculty in the department formed a committee to revise and develop the learning objectives for each English course, although it is unclear if developmental English courses were included in the process. Such a collaborative process allowed input from a variety of sources: "faculty members..., professors in other disciplines, academic literature, alumni, other institutions, and employers." The self-study indicates that all course objectives are

designed to build upon previous courses to reinforce one another, and there is an obvious coherence and continuity throughout the English curriculum.

Although the department has not taken planned initiatives in the process of evaluating and re-assessing the learning objectives regularly, the team finds it evident that individual efforts of assessing student learning needs are being made by faculty on a continuous basis. The team suggests that the department formalize the processes of evaluation and re-evaluation of the learning objectives on a regular basis for the purpose of quality assurance and continuous improvement. Such processes should also allow closer collaboration among the faculty and increase collegiality that is indicated lacking in the self-study report.

The English Department allows individual faculty to construct their own individual syllabi, and the team finds that such a practice encourages individuality and creativity in the process of teaching and learning. At the same time, the team notices that there is a lack of a clear formal process necessary for quality control in regard to the implementation of the departmental learning objectives in each and every course. A review of the syllabi included in the departmental notebook provided for the team's review on the visit revealed that there was a lack of consistency in the learning competencies listed on each syllabus enclosed. This inconsistency is also confirmed by the self-study report which indicates: "These competencies are listed on most of the syllabi," not in all syllabi. On a separate note, a need for developing a departmental mission statement is identified by many faculty as indicated in the self-study report. However, faculty present at the audit responded to questions about this statement as being a "low priority" and that the college mission statement was enough. Further discussion did not clarify why such a discrepancy in opinion existed between what is indicated in the self-study and what was indicated by the faculty present at the interview. The team feels that it is necessary for the department to further explore the issue regarding the necessity of establishing program goals as guidance for the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Focal Area Two: Curriculum and Co-Curriculum **Maturity Assessment: 3—Emergent Efforts**

During the audit team's conversations with the dean of the Humanities and the English faculty, the team witnessed the outstanding contributions that the individuals in the English department have made to their curriculum and teaching; therefore, the audit team feels that the maturity level of the English program at Roane State Community College in the area of curriculum and co-curriculum is at the "emergent effort level," a level that is defined by individual initiatives. The audit team agrees that the English Department at Roane State Community College is a fine department with a very able faculty under a strong leadership. The English Department deserves special commendations for the following programs that support its curriculum:

- The department's development of SmarThinking, an on-line tutoring service.
- The department's commitment to its fine writing labs.

Although the English faculty are conscientious about the curriculum and strive to achieve excellence, the team finds that such initiatives are largely individual in regards to curriculum design and evaluation. The English Department noted the key reason for this lack of collaborative structure beyond the individual effort by stating the following reasons in its academic audit self-study report: "The faculty members have not had much experience in collaborating with others on curriculum design. This is largely due to [the] 'diaspora [sic] of faculty members.' Most of the faculty commute to several campuses during the week, sometimes to several campuses a day. Due to differences in schedules and different locations, it is extremely difficult to find a time for the faculty to meet." The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that some campus locations are even in different time zones.

The team suggests that the English Department consider developing and implementing the following formal processes in its efforts of striving for excellence and quality of its curriculum and co-curriculum:

- a formal process for learning from best practices in curriculum design
- a formal process for assuring departmental objectives are incorporated into all individual faculty syllabi.
- a clear process for evaluating supplementary texts to assure they meet the departmental learning objectives for the courses
- a departmental process for collaborative curricular design.

The audit team feels that "to close the loop" and reach a more "mature effort" the Humanities Division should set aside a day during in-service devoted to collaborative meetings. The audit team also feels that because of the distances involved between the campuses that faculty should not be scheduled to teach during one afternoon a month to free up meeting times for these collaborative efforts. These easily implemented suggestions would facilitate "shared organizational learning," and help establish continuous improvement as a priority.

Focal Area Three: Teaching and Learning Methods **Maturity Assessment: 3—Emergent Efforts**

The Academic Audit team agrees that the English Department at Roane State Community College was not served well by its academic audit self-study report on Focal Area Three: Teaching and Learning Methods; however, the team feels that its discussion with the dean and the English faculty cleared up any difficulties created by the report. The team assesses the English Department's maturity level in the area of teaching and learning methods to be mostly at the "emergent effort level."

The team concurs that use of a specially developed pre-test and post test that tests for ENGL 1010 and ENGL 1020 competencies is an excellent experiment. Such a practice should allow instructors to obtain specific data on student learning outcomes and use them for improving teaching and learning effectiveness and achieving the expected learning outcomes. The team agrees that another commendation is due for the English

Department's use of stored English composition papers to check for consistency of grading practices in the department.

The establishment of the learning centers staffed by the English faculty and trained student tutors extends the department's efforts and commitment to meeting students' learning needs. The centers are shown to have a clear goal that reinforces the learning objectives established in the English courses and are widely utilized by students. As observed by the students present at the interview session on the visit, the learning centers are clearly a welcomed place for students to continue their learning under the guidance of the same sets of learning objectives students are introduced to in their classes. Students at the interview spoke highly of the quality of their learning experience at the centers and were satisfied with the personal attention and assistance they received to further their learning.

While the pre/post test of competencies mentioned earlier is an excellent idea, the team failed to find much evidence on how the results were used to better student learning outcomes. There seems to be missing this one last important step to complete the improvement process. Once again the team agrees that there seems to be no collaborative effort at the departmental level to share best teaching practices. The team feels that the student evaluation instrument is not directed towards improving teaching which would lead to improved student learning outcomes. The instrument rates teaching but is not specific enough to indicate problem areas and specific remedies. The team also notes that the stored English composition papers are never analyzed to see if the student learning outcomes contained within match the objectives and competencies listed on departmental syllabi.

The team, therefore, suggests that the English Department create a process where results from the pre/post tests are shared with all departmental faculty and that collaborative efforts are used to select best teaching practices to improve the indicated problem areas in student learning outcomes. The team also sees a need for the English Department to use a student evaluation instrument that is specifically directed toward the improvement of teaching. The team advises that the English Department consider using the Individual Development and Educational Assessment (IDEA) evaluation system which is directed towards improvement of teaching. Some consideration should also be given to exploiting the data possibilities contained in the stored English composition papers.

Focal Area Four: Student Learning Assessment **Maturity Assessment: 3—Emergent Efforts**

The faculty in the English Department rate themselves between the informal and organized effort in regard to assessment of student learning, and the team concurs. The informal, or emergent level, is characterized by individual initiatives and experimentation with quality principles. The self-study cites many examples of assessments used by individual faculty members in the classroom to assess learning. Each faculty member has the responsibility of designing assessments for his or her classes; therefore, a variety of techniques is used to determine student achievement of the learning objectives. There is

strong evidence that individual faculty members have a clear understanding of effective measures and how to use them in assessing learning. Furthermore, even with the autonomy of designing assessments, the faculty members primarily employ traditional evaluation techniques.

The departmental syllabi for the array of English courses generally identify a core of learning outcomes, and there is evidence that the department recognizes the need to work more collaboratively to design consistent assessments of the desired learning outcomes. The self-study reports that folders of students' work in the freshman courses are collected, stored, and sporadically reviewed; however, the use of the folders as a formal, departmental tool for assessing the defined learning outcomes has not become a departmental process. The self-study also references the General Education Assessment test, and the English faculty demonstrates an understanding of the assessment and the results. Although they agree that these data could be beneficial, the department had not formalized the analysis or application of the results to make improvements.

One initiative that demonstrates the department's commitment to quality is their project to hire an outside consultant to design pre-test and post-tests based upon the learning objectives for some of the courses. Some faculty members, on a voluntary basis, use this assessment program, and they report they have implemented improvements based upon the results. Although the team did not see the tests or results, the team suggests that this project as described by the faculty has the potential of providing meaningful data to assess student learning and a model for further application.

Although processes for assessing student learning are not formalized at the department level, the team finds clear evidence of student learning. Conversations with students from a range of majors affirm that they are gaining the skills and knowledge to be successful in English courses, and they are able to describe how they have applied what they learned to other academic requirements and to the work world. In particular, the team notes the clarity with which these students communicated their understanding of critical thinking and how they had been challenged by their instructors to think.

The team affirms the department's individual efforts for assessing student learning, the pilot program for using a standard test to measure value added, and the obvious commitment of the faculty members to improving learning outcomes. The team encourages the department to work to overcome the obstacles described in the self-study: "extensive use of adjuncts, time and distance, and the multiplicity of approaches in the department." Furthermore, the team suggests efforts be made to develop departmental processes that

- allow for regular review of institutional assessments related to learning outcomes;
- formalize collecting and analyzing results of the variety of assessments used by individual faculty to determine consistency, effectiveness, and areas for improvements;
- encourages an environment where quality processes become embedded at the departmental level

Focal Area Five: Quality Assurance
Maturity Assessment: 3—Emergent Efforts

As evidenced by the self-study and conversations with faculty members, the English Department at Roane State has a long history of commitment to quality. Each member has developed techniques and strategies to ensure the success of students. They have devised strategies to address what they describe as their major challenge: providing effective instruction on eight campuses in a very large service area. Within this context, the self-study reports that “the department is somewhere between informal and organized effort” in quality assurance processes. The team affirms this assessment.

The self-study includes several initiatives that describe measures the department pursues to ensure a quality English program. The team affirms the department’s commitment to these efforts, particularly the learning centers and the adjunct faculty mentoring project. Other efforts include: discussions of grading standards, evaluation of the faculty by the dean, peer evaluations, and mentoring. The faculty members demonstrate an understanding of continuous improvement processes as evidenced by their responses about making improvements in their individual courses. However, the team suggests that the department has not transferred their individual efforts into organized, systematic processes. Consistent with the emergent level, the department recognizes the need to work collaboratively to design, implement, evaluate, and improve processes that lead to effective student learning. Individual faculty members have implemented processes that could be shared with the department as best practices and could become organized, systematic activities to promote quality on a departmental level.

The team notes that quality assurance processes have been implemented in the use of the learning centers and the annual evaluation of faculty. Formal assessments have been conducted concerning the learning centers, and the results are being analyzed for possible improvements. Neither the self-study nor the faculty members elaborate about how the student evaluations, the faculty evaluation process, or institutional data are used to measure or assure quality; however, individual faculty members cite many examples of how they have used the results to implement improvements within their classes. They also report that professional development activities are pursued in an effort to address areas of need.

The department identifies several potential initiatives as a result of the academic audit self-study. While these initiatives appear to have merit, the team suggests that the department needs to begin by establishing institutional, departmental, and individual processes that support the goals of the department. The greatest asset of the department is the strong, dedicated faculty, and the team believes that the department has the potential to move from an emergent to the organized effort with increased support.

Application of Quality Principles

As indicated in the previous sections of the report, faculty in the English Department at Roane State Community College are well aware of the importance of assessing and determining students' needs and strive to meet those needs in their teaching. Clear learning objectives were formed for the English courses a few years ago, and faculty work diligently to assist students to achieve those objectives. Experiments and efforts, such as the use of pre/post tests, are being made to monitor and assess student learning outcomes, and individually, faculty are using many other different methods and techniques to collect feedback on learning outcomes. The English faculty are committed to quality learning, and the self-study report cites numerous examples of individual efforts to analyze how teaching is conducted, how students are learning, and how learning assessment is being approached. However, designing and taking more formalized measures at the departmental level would be helpful in collecting and analyzing the data to use them to improve student learning. Attention should also be given to the area of working collectively on education processes and learning from best practices both within the department and from other professionals in the field. Based on the evidence provided in the previous sections, the team suggests the overall assessment of the program's application of each of the seven quality principles would be a three using a one to five scale with five being the highest, except the first principle—define quality in terms of outcome, the rating of which is a four.

Overall Maturity Assessment

Based on the evidence and information collected from the conversations at the visit and the self-study report, the team suggests that the overall maturity of the program is at level three—emergent efforts. Such efforts are denoted largely by the individual activities and initiatives that faculty undertake in the course of achieving quality education and expected learning outcomes. However, there is every indication that faculty are aware of the importance of the formal quality processes needed and have begun the endeavor of striving to move the program to the next level of organized effort.

Conclusions

Commendations:

- The English faculty are committed to education quality and dedicated to effective student learning.
- Students demonstrate that tremendous learning occurs in the English classes.
- The learning centers are well developed and implemented to support the curriculum and assist student learning.
- SmartThinking provides effective on-line tutoring to students; it certainly plays a role complimentary to the formal curriculum.

- The adjunct management and mentoring system plays an important positive role in achieving consistency in the quality of teaching and meeting student's learning needs.
- The curriculum is constructed with a clear core of learning outcomes, and there is obvious coherence throughout the curriculum.

Affirmations:

- The pretest and posttest measurement shows promising results, and this project has the potential of providing meaningful data to assess student learning and being a model for further application.
- The department's practice of collecting and storing student works as data used to check for consistency of grading practices in the program has merit, and the efforts should be furthered by conducting systematic analysis to determine if the student learning outcomes contained within match the objectives and competencies listed on departmental syllabi.
- The initiative to create a "virtual meeting place" on WebCT holds promise to improve collaboration and to promote learning from best practices, a need identified by the faculty.

Recommendations:

The team suggests that the department explore the possibilities to design, implement, evaluate, and improve processes that lead to effective student learning. These may specifically include processes that will

- allow faculty to work collaboratively and to learn from best practices in teaching, learning, and curriculum design;
- evaluate and reassess the departmental learning objectives on a regular basis for continuous improvement.
- assure departmental objectives are incorporated into all individual faculty syllabi, and supplementary texts are evaluated to assure they meet the departmental learning objectives for the courses
- allow for regular review of institutional assessments related to learning outcomes;
- formalize collecting and analyzing results of the variety of assessments used by individual faculty to determine consistency, effectiveness, and areas for improvements;
- create an environment where quality processes become embedded at the departmental level

Overall Assessment:

The English Department at Roane State Community College is a fine department with a great asset of dedicated faculty. The team agrees that faculty are highly committed to quality and improvement in the process of teaching and learning, and student learning outcomes are clearly their focus. Learning objectives are well defined in a coherent way, and the curriculum is established with a goal of serving students with different needs. The department has a great culture that will allow it to reach its potential of becoming one of the best learning organizations.