

March 30, 2009

Ms. Linda Suskie, Vice President
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
3624 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Ms. Suskie:

Based upon the findings of the 2007 Self-Study and Evaluation Team visit to Lancaster Bible College & Graduate School, on June 29, 2007 the Commission requested a progress letter be submitted “documenting implementation of an organized and sustained process to assess the achievement of student learning outcomes.” This letter is to serve as that progress report.

The progress made by Lancaster Bible College & Graduate School in the area of assessment since our 2007 Evaluation Team visit can be summarized under six major areas, (1) the 2007 Evaluation Team Recommendations, (2) the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment, (3) the Assessment Plan, (4) Academic Units Progress, (5) Student Support Units Progress, and (6) Institutional Level Assessment & Accountability. As we have become more organized and systematic in our approach to assessment, we have been mindful of the need to address both assessment paradigms; that of assessment for continuous improvement and that of assessment for accountability.

1. 2007 Evaluation Team Recommendations

In our 2007 Self-Study document, LBC acknowledged the need for additional work in the area of assessment. Assessment was occurring on campus, especially in the academic areas, but a more organized and systematic effort was needed. Of the 84 recommendations we made for ourselves, 11 had to do with assessment in some form. Of those 11 self-imposed assessment recommendations, the Evaluation Team identified 5 of the highest priority and included them in their report as recommendations. Each of these recommendations has already been addressed as noted in Appendix A.

2. Office of Institutional Research & Assessment

In order to create a sustained process of assessment, Lancaster Bible College & Graduate School has made a commitment in terms of both personnel and finances. As a result of our Self-Study process, LBC recognized the need to establish the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment (OIRA) and to appoint a Director of Institutional Research & Assessment (DIRA). The position was established effective July 1, 2007. On that date the Director of the Degree Completion Program (DCP) was appointed as the DIRA due to his exemplary work in conducting assessment in that program and in leading the 2007 Self-Study Steering Committee

Besides overseeing all assessment on campus, the DIRA is directly responsible for measuring the accomplishment of LBC's Mission, Core Values, Institutional Goals, and Core Knowledge & Skills. To that end, the director serves on the Committee for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning (CIEP) to ensure that assessment is an integral part of the overall planning process. In August of 2007 the DIRA presented an overview of assessment and his goals to the CIEP.

The initial OIRA budget for the fiscal year 2007-2008 was \$65,108 with \$1,700 of that going towards assessment instruments and \$2,425 designated for educational materials and conferences. The 2008-2009 budget included a 7.5% increase with almost all of the increase (\$4,000) going towards additional assessment tools. When all departments were asked to cut 3% of their 2008-2009 budget due to the economic downturn, the DIRA was able to do so without cutting back on any monies earmarked for assessment instruments.

To assist the DIRA in the evaluation of assessment, the Committee for Institutional Research & Assessment was established. This committee consists of individuals representing all four major areas of the college; Academics Affairs, Institutional Advancement, Enrollment Management, and Student Services.

3. Assessment Plan

Since our Evaluation Team visit, an Assessment Plan has been developed (see accompanying document). This document outlines our current assessment of student learning outcomes at five levels; Course, Program, Division, Core Knowledge & Skills, and Institutional. A section of the Plan is devoted to each of these levels and includes a delineation of Assessment Goals, Assessment Procedures, Assessment Monitoring and the Use of Results. The Plan also includes a schedule for institutional and divisional level norm- or criterion-referenced testing.

For over five years now, our academic programs have been using a five-column outcomes assessment grid proposed by Nichols and Nichols. Many of these grids were in place for review during our 2007 team visit. However, since the visit we have adapted the grid to include a sixth column. This sixth column takes the "use of results" column one step further by providing a place to indicate whether an Action Plan or a Strategic Initiative is needed, thus facilitating to an even greater degree the unit's ability to close the assessment/planning loop. Action Plans and Strategic Initiatives are follow-up activities that have been identified based upon the findings of an assessment of the unit's outcomes. We define an Action Plan as a follow-up activity which can be accomplished by the unit with its available resources. A Strategic Initiative, on the other hand, is needed if the follow-up activity to be taken requires additional resources which must be approved by the Committee for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning or some other administrative body on campus.

4. Academic Units Progress

Four months after our 2007 Team visit, the Director of Institutional Research & Assessment conducted a full day workshop with the faculty as part of their annual two-day training. An overview of assessment was given, including the faculty's responsibilities in assessing student learning. An emphasis was placed on course embedded assessment with several examples given. A workshop activity was assigned to the three divisions for the afternoon. Each faculty member was then given the assignment of developing one course embedded information literacy assessment assignment for a Spring 2008 course. Of the full-time faculty, 87% completed the assignment.

Faculty have access to a variety of assessment training and tools through the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment's webpage. In addition to the aforementioned 2007 Faculty Workshop materials that are online, Faculty also have access to information about Classroom Assessment Techniques, Rubrics, and Information Literacy, as well as tools to assist them in Program Evaluation.

During the summer of 2008, a curriculum mapping database program was developed whereby course objectives can be tied to higher level objectives and goals, including Programs, Departments, Divisions, General Education (including information literacy), and Core Knowledge & Skills. This program was first pilot tested with 17 Fall 2008 courses including some from each of the three divisions. The official roll-out of this curriculum mapping program will start in the Fall of 2009. Additional courses will be added to the database as they come up in rotation.

Starting in the fall of 2008, the Director of Institutional Research & Assessment was given one session of the Connecting with Community weekly workshops for new faculty. As part of this session, all new faculty members were given a copy of *Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Angelo and Cross. In addition to the session the DIRA conducts on institutional-wide assessment, the chair of the Teacher Education Department leads two sessions on classroom-specific assessment and gives each member who request one a copy of Linda Suskie's *Assessing Student Learning*. Also in the fall of 2008, the Faculty Portfolio template was modified so that assessment is acknowledged as a vital part of the instructional process. Faculty are encouraged to highlight their achievements in this area

Additional work in ensuring that all academic programs keep assessment at the forefront has come through the Director of Institutional Research & Assessment's membership on the Curriculum Revision Task Force. As a member of this task force, the DIRA is ensuring that assessment of student learning outcomes is an integral part of all new and revised department, program, and course objectives.

The publicly accessible Office of Institutional Research & Assessment's website includes a page where all Comprehensive Outcomes Assessment Plans (COAPs) can be found. [Due to a major compromise of the integrity of our website during the spring of 2008, LBC is currently rebuilding our web presence. While the Research & Assessment pages are not currently available, they have been given a high priority for restoration.] Each academic program has a

section where they post their COAP as well as any supporting documents, action plans, and strategic planning initiatives. The three COAPs that track the measurement of higher level outcomes would be the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment for our Core Knowledge & Skills, the Division of Arts & Sciences Education for general education outcomes, and the Division of Biblical Education for outcomes related to the essence of our mission. At the time of our evaluation team visit in April 2007, 29 (60%) of all academic programs had COAPs posted. As of March 2009, there are 44 (92%) posted.

It should be noted that at this time all undergraduate academic programs are in the third and final year of a curriculum review and revision. This extensive process has been serving as an action plan for all academic programs since the fall of 2006. Therefore, most undergraduate academic programs have an Action Plan link to the same document, the Curriculum Revision Action Plan. Some have additional Action Plans as well. Due to the concentration on the Curriculum Revision, there are very few strategic planning initiatives for academic units in process at this time.

5. Student Support Units Progress

In January of 2008, CIEP approved a six-year assessment cycle for Student Support Units (i.e. all non-academic units), similar to the one recently put in place for Academic Units. While each unit's COAP is to be continuously updated and given oversight by the appropriate Vice President, this cycle calls for a formal review of the COAP every two years, and a full program review every six years.

During the Spring of 2008, the Director of Institutional Research & Assessment conducted four workshops with all Student Support Units to assist them in understanding their role in support of student learning outcomes and to also assist them in furthering the development of their COAPs. Department heads or other unit supervisors were present from 30 units representing Institutional Advancement, Student Services, Enrollment Management, and Academic Support. This number represents a 94% attendance rate of the total number of Student Support Units on campus (not including the three vacant positions at the time). By the end of each workshop, the participants; (1) demonstrated an understanding of how their unit's goals support student learning and are tied to broader institutional goals such as the college's mission or vision, (2) formulated or revised a set of outcomes for their unit that support their unit mission statement, (3) verbally demonstrated a better understanding of how to develop assessment procedures to evaluate the accomplishment of those outcomes, and (4) submitted some questions for possible inclusion in a variety of surveys (student, graduate, alumni, and employee).

By September 1 of 2008, support units submitted a COAP with at least the first three columns completed. These three columns demonstrate that they have a clear and current unit mission statement linked to broader college goals, that they have specific and measurable unit goals to support their unit mission, and that they have several criteria by which to measure those goals. By January 1, 2009, 80% of all support units re-submitted their COAPs with at least one outcome assessed by both direct and indirect means (fourth column) and included some suggested use of the results (fifth column). Some Action Plans and Strategic Initiatives were proposed (sixth column) based upon these results. The publicly accessible Office of Institutional

Research & Assessment's website [though temporarily out of service] includes a page where all COAPs are posted as well as any supporting documents, action plans, and strategic planning initiatives. At the time of our evaluation team visit in April 2007, 13 (38%) support units had COAPs posted. As of March 2009, 30 (88%) have COAPs posted.

6. Institutional Level Assessment & Accountability

The college has participated in seven nationally normed or comparative assessment studies in the first two years since our 2007 team visit. It is recognized that this level of assessment cannot be sustained and a more realistic schedule has been developed (see accompanying Assessment Plan). In addition, an IPEDS Custom Comparison Group was developed for the first time. This group consists of 51 other Bible colleges with membership in the Association for Biblical Higher Education and represents a more accurate representation of our peers than the Carnegie's Specialized Institutes that we have been previously comparing ourselves. In addition, we continue to develop other comparison groups through IPEDS to focus on specific criteria we wish to assess.

In considering assessment as accountability, LBC is participating in the National Association of Independent Colleges and University's University and Colleges Accountability Network (U-CAN). From LBC's U-CAN page, interested parties can reach the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment's page by clicking on Academics and then Institutional Research & Assessment. This page includes all of our assessment documents, assessment reports, our latest Self-Study document, as well as a variety of other items.

Conclusion

While we acknowledge we will continue to fine-tune our assessment process, we trust this progress letter has been able to demonstrate we have taken steps to improve campus-wide assessment and that an assessment plan is in place that outlines a sustained process for assessing the achievement of student learning outcomes. We are confident that the culture of assessment which has begun to take hold on the campus these past two years will be even more fully developed by the time we submit our Periodic Review Report in three years.

We as an institution of biblical higher education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania remain most grateful to you for your fine service on behalf of our school. Thank you so much for the help you continue to be to us as we strive to be a premier institution.

Cordially,

Peter W. Teague, Ed.D.
President

Appendix A

Assessment Recommendations from 2007 Evaluation Team Report

Assessment Recommendation	How Addressed
<p>While there is evidence that the Comprehensive Outcomes Assessment Plan (COAP) and the Committee for Institutional Effectives and Planning (CIEP) are integrated, the links appear more apparent in the use of retention data, graduation rates, attrition and relevancy of the program. A challenge will be to link student learning outcomes to the strategic planning process. The new Director of Institutional Research and Assessment (DIRA) will become a member of CIEP which will certainly help in this regard. The Team strongly recommends special attention be given to this effort and yearly assessment of success be monitored internally.</p>	<p>A sixth column was added to the COAP grid to provide a place to note when an Action Plan or Strategic Initiative is needed. Copies of all Action Plans and Strategic Plans are forwarded to the DIRA for monitoring purposes. CIEP meeting minutes further document the successful closing of the assessment and planning loop.</p>
<p>The Team recommends that the college demonstrate how assessment results are used to improve teaching, learning, and institutional programs and services.</p>	<p>An emphasis has been placed on all units, both Academic and Student Support, to use Comprehensive Outcomes Assessment Plans (COAPs) as a means of documenting the achievement of outcomes to improve teaching, learning, and institutional programs and services. COAPs are updated continuously and are posted on LBC's assessment website for review.</p>
<p>The Team concurs with the present plan to form a committee for Institutional Research and Assessment and recommends that this group be charged to act as a resource to the campus for assessment activities, give thoughtful feedback and suggestion to plans and reports submitted, and act as ambassadors for assessment to campus groups.</p>	<p>The Committee for Institutional Research & Assessment was formed in September of 2007. Meeting minutes document that the activities of this committee are meeting the recommendation given.</p>
<p>While some direct forms of assessment are being used, with pre- and post-tests developed and administered in the Biblical Studies department, the Team recommends that LBC expand current direct assessment to include some nationally-normed tests (such as Academic Profile, MAPP, or CLA) and/or more course embedded assessments using rubrics designed by the department to assess student success.</p>	<p>In the Spring of 2008, the Arts & Sciences Division chose to incorporate MAPP as a nationally-normed instrument for their division. In addition, the newly created Assessment Plan as well as individual department COAPs outline additional types of assessment instruments and procedures being utilized by the various units.</p>
<p>The Team recommends that LBC follow its self-study recommendation to simplify and focus on the assessment process and continue to implement assessment plans and review assessment data. As data becomes available, it should be used to modify and improve teaching, curriculums, and courses to better achieve learning outcomes. Each department or unit could designate two-three outcomes to assess in each cycle, with both direct and indirect forms of assessment.</p>	<p>This recommendation has been implemented as evidenced by the Assessment Plan developed in 2008 and by the fact that 90% of all units, in both Academic and Student Support areas, now have functional COAPs compared to 52% in April of 2007.</p>

