

Update for the Faculty on Lincoln's Monitoring Report
Submitted October 1, 2005 to Middle States Commission on Higher Education
(A follow-up to Lincoln's Periodic Review Report May 2003)
September 30, 2005

Introduction

The Monitoring Report discusses Lincoln's continued progress in student retention, in making improvements in the teaching and learning process through assessment of student performance, and how resource allocation is linked to the institutional strategic plan and prioritized goals. It notes with a cautious optimism evidence an improvement in Freshman to sophomore retention rates, which have been holding around 62%. However, the most recent preliminary retention data indicate a retention rate of 74% of freshmen entering in Fall 2004 returning as sophomores in Fall 2005.

Retention

While not solely addressed by any one division-Academic, Student, or Fiscal Affairs-there has been a general awakening over the past several years that retention is a joint responsibility of all of the Institution's constituencies. Exit interview surveys of students who leave Lincoln before graduating reveal a number of retention factors across all institutional functions. The fiscal area, which oversees a range of activities from bursar and cashier services to grounds-keeping and building maintenance, is more keenly aware that the level of customer service and general appearance and functionality of the campus landscape and physical plant have an impact on the quality of student life and whether or not students stay to graduate. Student Affairs has always been aware of factors affecting student satisfaction and retention. These revolve around a range of conditions from friendliness and usability of the various functions-admissions, financial aid, counseling, student activities, student government, food service, athletics to cite a few-to recreational and social activities and overall campus ambience. The academic sphere has always been aware that it plays a significant role in retention and has more and more looked inwardly to those areas where there is significant instructor-student interaction for making improvements. Our latest retention data indicate overall progress.

Assessment of Student Performance

The responsibility for assessment has more appropriately fallen primarily upon the shoulders of the academic faculties of the three Schools. While no means done uniformly, here too, there has been a general awakening to a need-in this case the need for both formative and summative assessments, even if accorded different weights of importance in the different Schools. One of the great values of doing Self-Studies, Periodic Reviews, and Monitoring Reports is that these activities, of course, concentrate attention on the need for continually assessing, evaluating, and improving our students' performance both inside and outside of the classroom. The Academic departments have engaged assessment processes, some more effectively than others. In order to achieve a greater uniform, across-the-board effectiveness, the Office of Academic Affairs initiated a once-or twice annually Planning and Assessment Work Shop (PAWS) to assist faculty

members in their respective major areas to establish goals, evaluate prior goals, and set new goals based on assessment of student performance.

Budgeting Based on Priorities and Strategic Goals

Increasing emphasis is now placed upon one particular question asked of each vice president at budget preparation time: "How does a proposed budget item satisfy an institutional, divisional, or departmental priority or strategic goal?" The question, in turn, is passed along to deans, directors, department chairs, and student government officers. By the end of the day, it confronts individual faculty members, staff, and students who operate in the institutional "trenches." While such a shift in approach may take time to spread into the institutional culture, the 2004-05 academic year gave evidence of its beginning to sink in. As a result, actions have been taken that might not have been otherwise and potential actions were postponed or canceled altogether. The FY 2005-06 budget was developed around an application of this critical question as several major items in every division were the direct outcome of linking strategic goals and priorities to budget development.

The most physically apparent budgeted outcomes based on priorities are to be found in the physical plant area. Priorities set in 1999 and supported by the Governor and State Legislature finally began to take shape between Fall 2002 and Spring 2003. These included a major infrastructure project (e.g., mainly underground conduits for steam, sewage, and telecommunication cable lines). Additionally, trained Student Affairs support staff from admissions to financial aid and campus life were budgeted in response to priorities based assessment and planning. A new residence hall was financed through bonds and built within a two-year period as a consequence of painstaking planning, assessment. Since 2002, extensive academic reforms have been initiated based on new priorities and by Fall 2005, five additional faculty slots were budgeted in priority academic programs.

Conclusion

Lincoln University's Monitoring Report delineates the Institution's progress toward improving student retention, the use of assessment to improve the learning process, and how the Institution commits resource allocations to the realization of its strategic plan goals and priorities. There has been a gradual reawakening to outcomes assessment among the campus constituencies, from the academic to the fiscal domains. In a "systems sense," this would parallel Lincoln's rediscovery of its historic identity. There are signs of an emerging campus culture that is becoming self-corrective and self-actualizing in the areas being addressed: improved retention, assessment used for making improvements in student performance, and budget development that reflects strategic goals and priorities. While the Institution has made impressive progress, as 74% of entering freshmen are staying to become sophomores, we now strive for a more unified, across-the-board accountability.