Ferris State University

Imagine More

March, 2009

HLC Self Study Update

Student Government Weighs In

At a meeting of the Student Government Association in January 2009, the HLC Self-Study Coordinator and Steering Committee co-chairs (Teahen, Cairns, and Cooper) met with this student leadership group to gather their ideas about the ways they believe that Ferris meets the criteria for accreditation as well as the areas that should be improved. Michael Cooper facilitated the session by dividing students into groups that addressed relevant questions. Each group was then invited to "report out," along with submitting an individual list of their perceptions of the University's strengths and weaknesses. The conversations were lively. A list of the students' contributions can be found here: *http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/HLC/progress.htm*

Strengths

Among the greatest strengths of Ferris, according to this group of students, are the **internship programs**. They believe that Ferris is doing the right thing by requiring internships for most majors and highly recommending them for others. Students feel that these opportunities provide an avenue for them to showcase their skills and to enhance their education. Another strength that the students identified was the ability to attend administrative University meetings and have numerous **networking** opportunities with not only the administration but the faculty as well, including opportunities to participate in the planning and master plan sessions. **RSOs** are a positive. The **small class sizes** and **credentialed faculty**, vs. the graduate assistants or teaching aides common at other institutions is an additional strength, one that makes it possible for faculty to provide additional help. An **array of support systems** were also mentioned as strengths, ranging from the **Job Fair and career workshops to new classroom furniture, technology, the Tutoring Center, the Writing Center**, and the **FLITE library**.

Areas for Improvement

Students also had suggestions for areas needing improvement. They are concerned about the **low diversity** in education and thought around campus. They came to Ferris for its unique programs, but they report that **few of their peers know about Ferris** and that it seems that most of our students come from the west side of the state. Another area that could be improved is the image that Ferris is a **"suitcase"** campus. Students feel that most students have the perception that everyone goes home for the weekend and not many stay, even when there are events. Even though **technology** was listed as a strength, it was also listed as a weakness. The consensus was that there is enough day-to-day technology in classrooms and the library, but when it comes to advanced technology, such as **Smartboards**, Ferris is lacking. Some also

mentioned that the College of Engineering Technology is "lacking technology." Students also believe there is a need for the **library** to stay **open later**, more available **study rooms**, **more SLA** classes, and a **more efficient tutoring** center.

Students also expressed concerns about the **lack of variety in teaching methods** and the **lack of involvement of faculty** in campus activities. One student said: *"Professor involvement – I think students do a great job on this campus at serving the community, but there is a lack of professors getting involved in the community and on the campus. See the same small group at every event. It's hard when you want students to be more service oriented, and they follow this model – why should they?"*

Some expressed dismay that faculty who are reported to be **ineffective** over long periods of time continue to be ineffective, so that it appears that the University does nothing to address its problems. They also observed what they say is commonly known as **The Ferris Shuffle**, or the **Ferris Run-Around**, a situation where students are bounced around from person to person or office to office in trying to resolve problems and sometimes finding that no one knows the answers.

Criterion Committees Report Out

In five consecutive Wednesday afternoons, from 3:30 – 6 p.m., from February 4 through March 4, Criterion Committees reported their preliminary findings. The Committees' reports can be found here: *http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/HLC/progress.htm*

Each committee identified what their group considered to be the key strengths and the areas most needing improvement, as required in the final Self-Study report. At this point, there is considerable redundancy, because most Criterion Committees were divided into four or five work groups that addressed the Core Components that comprise the Criterion. The next iteration will collapse some of these findings into the essential few conclusions for each Criterion. Highlights from the Criterion 1 Committee, co-chaired by **Paul Blake** and **Abdi Ferdowsi**, are offered below. Future newsletters will include the preliminary findings for Criteria 2-5.

Criterion 1 – Mission and Integrity

Strengths

- Visible mission statement
- Active and ongoing discussion and revision of mission statements across campus
- Active and ongoing discussion and revision of alignment across campus
- Ferris' 125-year history
- Inclusion of diversity in vision and goals for university
- Funding and staffing a Diversity Office
- Planning documents to set diversity goals in all divisions
- Current service areas support diverse students populations
- Ongoing initiatives to welcome diverse populations
- There is considerable work underway University-wide to educate faculty, staff, and students about the mission and to incorporate it into University business and teaching practices.
- The inclusiveness of the University community in the development of the mission has been distinctive
- Appropriate Board of Trustees structure/policies to provide guidance for governance
- Integrated mission (vision/values) in Board of Trustees
- Multiple means to communicate with internal/external structures
- Multiple structures for collaborative processes
- Relationship document between FFA/Administration

Areas for Improvement

- More public display of mission
- More student communication/involvement
- Tolerance by Ferris community for people of diverse backgrounds (culture change)
- Certain measurements need to be completed
- Need more efforts in certain divisions
- Fostering understanding and support for the University mission is an initiative that never ends. It is the essence of what drives the current and future work of the University and must continuously be clearly articulated and followed and kept as an integral part of the University's planning process.

Between now and August, the Criterion Committees will produce their first draft of their sections. In August, these reports will be handed off to Sandy Balkema, who will begin the writing and editing process. By the end of the fall semester, the entire campus community will be invited to read the first full draft of our Self-Study, and review sessions will be conducted.