Criterion Three

Student learning through effective teaching is the foundation of Northeastern State University. Assessment and evaluation are the essential components by which meaningful change occurs. It is a fundamental principle in determining the university's fulfillment of its mission to "empower students" through a "culture of learning and discovery".

Core Component 3a.

Northeastern State University has taken significant steps in ensuring student outcomes are stated and effectively assessed. Establishing a culture of assessment whereby each course and each program within the institution will be assessed has begun with the question, "What do we want our students to know and be able to do?" Moving from an "input" process to an "output" process has been a philosophical shift.

Discipline specific accreditation programs are well ahead of non-discipline specific accreditation programs in the implementation of student learning outcomes and the assessments of those outcomes. Certification tests, Assessment in the Major reports, course evaluations, and employer surveys in addition to discipline specific accreditation reports are evidence for student learning outcomes and the assessment of those outcomes. The Assessment in the Major report lists the learning outcomes for each major program and requires summary data and an evaluation of the data. As a part of that process, programs have identified learning outcomes and mapped those outcomes to the curriculum. Self-studies have led to the establishment of five year program goals that are tied to coursework. Course syllabi articulate the learning outcomes for each course. Assessments of those learning goals are becoming standardized through such instruments as common finals for courses, national examinations, comprehensive examinations, and state examinations. Multiple assessments at

the course, program and institution levels result in triangulation of data by which evidence driven decisions can be made.

As a public institution, data points such as graduation rates, retention rates, and passing rates on licensing exams are available to external constituents through the Academic Affairs Office and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education in addition to college and program web sites.   State licensing exams results and specialized professional association standards attainment are also reported in discipline specific accreditation reports.

Faculty collaborates to establish common student outcomes and the assessment of those outcomes. At the program level, Assessment in the Majors reports provide aggregate data that is reviewed by program chairs/directors, department chairs, deans and the university. Changes based upon evaluation of the assessment data follow a curriculum change process at the program, department, and college levels with final institutional approval given by the Curriculum Education and Policy Council. When warranted, final curriculum change recommendations are approved by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. The Office of Assessment and Institutional Research assists faculty, staff, and administration to develop assessment activities and plans. The office also compiles and houses reports including annual assessment reports, enrollment reports, common data sets, and various college portrait data.

General education

In August, 2007, a General Education Task Force (GETF) was appointed to review the general education requirements at Northeastern State University. The last thorough review of these requirements was conducted in the 1980's. The GETF held more than thirty meetings during the course of two years reviewing state regents' requirements, surveying stakeholders,

reviewing requirements of sister institutions, and conducting various feedback opportunities including focus groups and town hall meetings.   The guiding principle around which the group worked was, "What students should know when they graduate from NSU." Seven areas were identified as content areas in which general education requirements were to be derived: Written and oral communication, social and behavioral science, global perspectives, life skills, humanities, natural sciences, and quantitative analysis. The GETF recommended goals for skills attainment for students from the general education content areas:

- Leadership Development;
- Collaboration;
- Creativity and Imagination (both individual and collaborative);
- Social Awareness (includes civic engagement and community service);
- Integration of Skills and Knowledge;
- Tolerance for Ambiguity;
- Improved Written Communication;
- Adaptation to Changing Environments;
- General Research (with or without technology);
- Critical Thinking;
- Problem Solving; and
- Understanding One's Culture and the Culture of Others

Also recommended by the GETF was the use of common syllabi for general education courses with multiple sections and maintaining a General Education Committee that would continually monitor the general education process and make recommendations for changes based upon assessment data. A one-hour General Education Capstone Course was created as a means for students to conceptualize what they have learned in the seven general education content areas. The GETF stated, "Students must demonstrate computer proficiency, which includes the competent use of a variety of software and networking applications" (General Education Task Force Report, 2009, p. 11). The recommendations of the GETF will be implemented in fall, 2010.

Core Component 3b.

Northeastern State University values and supports effective teaching. From the tenure/promotion process to the Center for Teaching and Learning, the university requires evidence of effective teaching by its faculty. "Effective Classroom Teaching" and "The Scholarship of Teaching", as defined by the Boyer Model, are essential criteria for promotion and tenure.

This process begins with hiring practices for faculty in which evidence of effective teaching and a commitment to student learning are crucial components. With these qualifications, faculty has the expertise to write and deliver curriculum through best practices instructional models. The Faculty Development Policy, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), and Service Learning grants are support structures for faculty professional development activities that encourage innovative teaching strategies. The academic colleges also provide professional development to assist with improved pedagogies. Student course assessments and peer and chair reviews enable evaluations and subsequent changes to be made based upon the data derived from the appropriate assessments.

Effective teaching is recognized through the Circle of Excellence Teaching award and the Modeling the Way award. Faculty is encouraged to attend professional conferences, particularly when presenting. The Center for Teaching and Learning offers professional development activities to improve teaching pedagogy through research based best practices. NSU participates in the DaVinci Institute, and two faculty have been honored as DaVinci Fellows for excellence in teaching.

The Center for Teaching and Learning provides support for faculty development of online, blended, and video-conference courses. The number of online and blended classes

has increased. To ensure highest quality, the university has adopted the "Quality Matters" model for development and implementation of online courses.   Expenditures of funds for technology and faculty stipends to support online and blended course development are available.

Effective classroom teaching for promotion and tenure is demonstrated by student course assessments, self-assessments, and external assessments. Reflection upon the assessments and changes made based upon those assessments are integral in the demonstration of effective classroom teaching in the tenure/promotion process. The NSU Faculty Handbook defines "Effective Teaching" as:

> This section is a comprehensive overview of your record and accomplishments in teaching. In addition to information on classes taught and teaching load, it should include your own self-assessments, external assessments such as peer evaluations and summaries of formal student evaluations, and any relevant outcomes assessment data that may be available. As is made clear by the following list, teaching involves not only classroom instruction, but also a variety of activities that take place outside the classroom.
>
> 1. General teaching load
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> 2. Teaching load by semester (course, credit hours, lecture/lab/clinical, number of students, campus where taught, student assistance, graduate/undergraduate credit)
>
> 3. Undergraduate research/development projects supervised by semester
>
> 4. Graduate research/development projects supervised by semester
>
> 5. Workshops, Institutes, and Short Courses taught if not a part of regular load

6. Self-evaluation of teaching including methodology and/or philosophy of teaching, theories of learning process, etc.

7. Student evaluations (summary sheets with dates, semester, course title and number)

8. Faculty (peer) evaluations

9. Departmental/Dean evaluations (Faculty Handbook, July, 2010, p. 87)

The "Scholarship of Teaching" moves teaching beyond transmission of knowledge into the transformation and extension of knowledge. This scholarly activity encourages faculty to help their students to become critical thinkers. The NSU Faculty Handbook defines the Scholarship of Teaching as:

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. When viewed as scholarship, teaching moves beyond the realm of transmitting knowledge into the broader area of transforming and extending knowledge as well. The scholarly teacher both educates and entices future scholars by stimulating active learning and encouraging students to be critical, creative thinkers, with the ability to be lifelong learners. Examples of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning include:

- New courses and laboratories developed or major changes in such materials (courses and dates)
- Course bibliographies
- Advising and counseling students regarding course content (number of students, time involved)
- Experimental or innovative teaching (description and evaluation)
- Preparation of instructional media (type, description, date)
- Supervision of thesis or other student projects (including clinical supervision)

- Honors courses taught

- Grants for teaching improvement or curriculum development

- Letters of support, internal and external (Faculty Handbook, July, 2010, p. 88)

Evidence of effective classroom teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning are part of the application process for both promotion and tenure.

Valuing and supporting effective teaching are also evidenced by faculty participation in professional organizations pertaining to the content areas in which they teach. The tenure/promotion process includes the Scholarship of Application. This scholarly activity is defined as, "The Scholarship of Application is characterized by the dynamic interaction of theory and practice which results in new understanding. Consequently, the lessons learned from the application of knowledge should inform and enrich teaching" (Faculty Handbook, July, 2010, p. 89). Evidence for meeting this scholarly activity includes "service on national boards with research or scholarly functions" and "presentations/participation at professional meetings" (ibid).

Core Component 3c.

Assessment data evaluation is an important practice in the creation and improvement of the learning environment. Student course assessments, program reviews, accreditation reports, and assessment reports are some of the mechanisms used for an evaluative, reflective process for improved environments that support all learners.

The diversity of the student population at NSU is important and respected. NSU's beginnings lie with the establishment of the Cherokee National Female Seminary in 1846. The higher education tradition begun with the female seminary continues today as NSU confers baccalaureate degrees to more American Indians than any other university in the

country. NSU also has the highest number of full-time American Indian undergraduate students in the country (16th Annual *Winds of Change* College Guide, fall, 2009). Twenty-eight and one half percent of the total NSU undergraduate enrollment in fall, 2009, was American Indian with twenty-one percent of the total graduate enrollment American Indian (NSU College Portrait). American Indian diversity is not the only type of diversity valued at NSU. Activities through the Office of Student Affairs demonstrate the university's commitment to a diversified, respected student body. Meeting the needs of all learners through the American with Disabilities Act is viewed not only as a responsibility but also as a means for ensuring all learners have an opportunity to learn.

Supportive mechanisms are employed to give students opportunities to be successful. All new and returning students to the Tahlequah campus are instructed to contact either the First-Year Experience (FYE) Center or Enrollment Services for an appointment to process their initial enrollment. Freshmen students are tested advised and enrolled through an individual appointment with a Student Success Specialist in FYE. Tahlequah transfer and returning students make an appointment to attend a Transfer Connection session where they are advised and enrolled with the help of faculty advisors. Students new to the Broken Arrow campus are admitted, advised and enrolled by New Student Advisors in the Administration building on an individual basis. Transfer students are immediately assigned a faculty advisor in their discipline and are encouraged to request that an official degree plan be developed on their behalf. Freshmen and continuing undeclared students are advised in FYE until they are eligible (the completion of at least fifteen (15) hours and ENGL 1113) and are ready to declare a major. Once this occurs, they are assigned a faculty advisor in accordance with the policy of each college, department or program, and are encouraged to request an official

degree plan. Students who have completed eighty-five (85) hours are expected to request a final degree check to confirm that they are progressing toward completion of their degree requirements (Faculty Handbook, p. 50).

Advising students is a part of a faculty member's responsibility as outlined in the Faculty Handbook, Section 10.0 Student Responsibilities (Faculty Handbook, July, 2010, p. 59). The importance of faculty advisement is emphasized in the promotion and tenure process under the "Contributions to the Profession and Institution" category (Faculty Handbook, July, 2010, p. 89). Enrollment personnel and faculty have participated in meetings sponsored by the National Academic Advising Association to improve the advisement process.

An "Early Alert System" is used to detect warning signs indicative of potential student failure. With the early detection, interventions can be made to assist the student. "MAP Works" will allow instructors to monitor students who are having difficulties in class.

Using technology to support student learning is improving. Recording class sessions and making them available via Podcast is an example of using technology to support student learning. The Quality Matters program will require online and blended classes meet rigorous standards, and the number of SmartBoards and Promethean Boards used for classroom instruction has increased. Requirements for the expenditure of technology funds state all purchases must be tied to student learning. The university's technology committee is charged with making decisions regarding the purchase and use of technology that supports student learning and effective teaching.

Core Component 3d.

Financial support and access to resources that support student learning and effective teaching comprise the foundation of the university's mission of, "…creating and sustaining a

culture of learning and discovery."   A culture of learning and discovery is not possible without educational resources.

New laboratories in the science buildings in Tahlequah and Broken Arrow, a new library in Broken Arrow, remodeling of performance spaces in Tahlequah are examples of the university's commitment to creating an environment conducive to effective teaching and student learning.   Another example is the reading and mathematics clinic at the Broken Arrow campus. This clinic provides undergraduate and graduate student candidates with hands-on opportunities to help school-aged children who struggle in the content areas of reading and mathematics. In this clinical setting, NSU student candidates are engaged in theory to practice work under the guidance of experts in the reading and mathematics fields. Another reading clinic is being built on the Tahlequah campus. Other examples of on-site clinical experiences include the fields of speech/pathology and optometry.

NSU has two Writing Centers, Tahlequah and Broken Arrow. The purpose of the writing centers is to serve as a literacy instruction site and to provide support to students writers in all disciplines. Part of the mission of the centers is, "The basic belief that writing allows people to learn deeply, to think more clearly, and to join the academic conversation serves as the cornerstone of the Writing Center's operation." The Writing Centers assist students with writing skills development from basic proper writing form to proper use of MLA and APA standards. Data compiled by the Writing Centers indicate that the number of students using the centers is increasing.

Tutoring services are available in math, writing, reading, communication, and sciences and through the Student Support Services. Online tutorial services will be made available to students providing immediate support using technology.

Blackboard serves as the online course management system for communication and delivery of course content and materials. Support for faculty use of Blackboard is provided by a Course Management Systems Administrator in the Center for Teaching and Learning. The center also provides faculty with professional development activities that are technologically based.

SmartChoice agreements with area community colleges make the transfer process simple for students transferring to NSU with an associate's degree. An example of the importance of this is NSU's fifty-four articulation agreements with Tulsa Community College. The articulation agreements with community colleges provide a seamless transition between the community college experience and entrance to a baccalaureate program.

NSU has undergone an academic prioritization process to determine the programs to which resources need to be directed. This includes increasing faculty in those programs that are strong and those that have growth potential.

Areas for Improvement

Creating a culture of assessment to promote effective teaching and student learning has had varying degrees of success at NSU. Programs under discipline specific accreditation processes have been developing a culture of assessment in their respective programs and colleges during the last few years. For non-discipline specific accredited programs, this development has been slow. Establishing student learning assessments is progressing, but making evidence driven changes based upon those assessments is sporadic and inconsistent. The institution's overall process for change whereby curriculum changes are based upon evaluation of assessment data is helping to drive the institution toward a culture of assessment. There are pockets where assessment and evaluation are used very well, so the

culture of assessment is evolving. The "Assessment of Student Learning Cycle", or more accurately, the assessment of student learning "spiral", still needs much work for it to truly be a part of the institution's culture. The ability to compile data then aggregate and disaggregate it to make evidence driven decisions is mainly done by hand through varying systems that are program specific. There is no central data base system by which assessment data can be derived in multiple ways to make evidence decisions.

Effective teaching is the absolute key to student learning. NSU has an excellent faculty committed to the mission and vision of the institution. However, there are inconsistencies in the tenure/promotion process among the colleges leading to inconsistencies in the defined standard of "Effective Classroom Teaching" and the "Scholarship of Teaching". These inconsistencies do impact student learning. While there is some recognition for outstanding teaching, there is not a process to honor those who are unswerving in their commitment to excellent teaching. The Faculty Development process to fund travel for faculty to conduct scholarly work with other discipline colleagues is significantly underfunded. Many faculty are doing outstanding research and service learning but do not have sufficient support to share their work nationally and internationally.

The advisement of students is inconsistent. There are faculty who are excellent student advisors and some who are not. Ongoing discussion as to professional advisement centers versus faculty advisors has not been conclusive as to what best serves the needs of NSU students. Because faculty advisement is a part of the tenure/promotion process, the establishment and application of a consistent tenure/promotion process as stated earlier is a means by which the advisement process could be improved.

While improvement in technology to support student learning and effective teaching has been made, overall, the institution is still behind in making use of technological resources available. It is a funding issue and a priority issue.

From its inception, Northeastern State University has been an institution committed to student learning through effective teaching because our mission is to, "…empower students to be socially responsible global citizens by creating and sustaining a culture of learning and discover."