WHAT IS FORTNIGHT?

A fortnight is a unit of time equivalent to 14 days. The term derives from the Old English feorwertyne niht, meaning “fourteen nights.” Inspired by the opportunities and challenges of Middle States Standard 14 and the desire to share information and best practices, FORTNIGHT is a communication vehicle, which is distributed online to the campus community.

ANNUAL MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION CONFERENCE FocusES ON ACCREDITATION IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education held its annual conference in Philadelphia on December 5-7, 2012, with a theme focused on coming changes in the higher education landscape. The College was represented this year by Interim President William Fritz, Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness Susan Holak, and Institutional Research Coordinator Warrick Bell. Colleagues from several of our CUNY sister campuses were also in attendance, including BMCC, Brooklyn, City, Hostos, John Jay, Kingsborough, Lehman, Medgar Evers, the New Community College, Queensborough, and York. As in previous years (see FORTNIGHT Volume 7 Issue 7, Volume 5 Issue 7, Volume 3 Issue 7, and Volume 1 Issue 6), we would like to take the opportunity to share aspects of the conference with the campus community.

The three plenary sessions focused on different aspects of environmental change. During the opening plenary, Cole Campese, Senior Director for Teaching and Learning with Technology at The Pennsylvania State University, focused on the speed of technological change and implications for instruction and pedagogy through five themes: multi-channel discourse, digital text, extending conversations, user-created content, and the social construction of knowledge.

Dr. Paul Lingenfelter, President of State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), spoke about challenges of self-regulation in an ever-changing digital environment. In his session on quality assurance in a digital age, he noted that while there are calls for more accountability in higher education, key learning objectives (e.g., critical and creative thinking or the ability to solve unscripted problems) are not easily measured, especially by standardized tests.

In the closing plenary, Dr. Nancy Zimpher, Chancellor of SUNY, spoke about a new term – “systemness” – that has been attributed to her, and used the State University to demonstrate how the impact of an institution on society can be measured and celebrated. As an example, to keep costs down and maintain quality in the 64-institution system, Dr. Zimpher is a proponent of shared services, collaboration, and recognizing mutual successes across institutions.

This year’s meeting included several sessions led by Vice Presidents of the Middle States Commission, who spoke in detail about accreditation events and Commission expectations. Having just completed our decennial visit, the College’s representatives were especially interested in sessions on expectations for the preparation of monitoring reports, as well as the next accreditation milestone – the Periodic Review Report (PRR) – a requirement to reaffirm accreditation at the five-year mark.

There was considerable discussion at this year’s conference about relatively recent federal requirements relating to the 2008 renewal of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which reauthorized the Higher Education Act (1965). The HEOA addresses issues such as
financial aid and cost containment in higher education; newly-implemented requirements pertain to 1] online student verification, 2] transfer credits, 3] student loan default rates, and 4] credit hours. The federal government released information about the credit hour requirement immediately preceding the conference, prompting Middle States to produce a new publication the day prior to the event, underscoring the importance of conference attendance and information exchange.

CLOSING THE LOOP: BELL SCHEDULE CHANGE INDICATES IMPROVEMENTS IN SPACE USAGE

Resulting from a series of student feedback and observational analyses performed by course scheduler Kerri Gerson (and supported by post-implementation analysis by the OIRA), the Office of the Registrar implemented a new “bell schedule” this semester to simplify and streamline the process of classroom allocation. The name derives from the idea of a school bell ringing to indicate the beginning or end of classes across the campus, and is a concept in common use nationwide. As implemented, the bell schedule allows for a 36% increase in class meeting opportunities; that is, the new schedule and time grid allows for an increase in the number of class meeting patterns from 19 to 25. When extended across the 89 available lecture spaces on campus, the course scheduling opportunities offered rise from 1691 to 2225.

Of particular importance is a 5% increase (89 meetings) in the available opportunities during prime-time – Monday to Friday, 10 AM–2 PM. Further, unless specifically requested by the professor, every one of the two- and three-day lecture courses on offer now meets in the same room and at the same time, regardless of the days of the week on which the class is scheduled.

Not only classroom meetings are affected by the change: club hours now allow for four hours per week instead of three, for student events, faculty meetings and college-wide activities. Finally, the bell schedule provides for more efficient use of Fridays without altering course meeting opportunities during the rest of the week.

CAMPUS UPDATES

Institutional Effectiveness Committee – The Institutional Effectiveness Committee, made up of representation from major offices and support areas across the College, met on Wednesday, November 28. The Committee, chaired by Associate Provost Susan Holak, discussed the Middle States Commission's action from June and the requirements for the follow-up Monitoring Report that is due on December 1, 2013. Dr. Sam Michalowski, Director of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, described possibilities for data sharing and omnibus surveys, implemented in order to limit the possibility of survey fatigue among campus constituents. Committee members received copies of the Institutional Effectiveness reporting template for 2011-2012 on which they were asked to record their assessment activities from the year just ended.

General Education Committee – The Committee met on December 3 to review and approve courses. In addition, Professor Richard Powers and Associate Provost Susan Holak, Co-chairs of the Middle States Reaccreditation Process, discussed the Monitoring Report and its focus on Standards 12 and 14, the recommendation to align the College's General Education goals with Pathways, and the role of the General Education Committee in assessment. They proposed that the Committee consider forming two sub-committees, one to address goal alignment and the other to address additional assessment approaches.

Foundations of Excellence – The Foundations of Excellence project described in previous issues of FORTNIGHT is well underway. Two important surveys – one for students and the second designed for faculty/staff – provide important project data. The survey windows will open soon and remain active for several weeks. Please watch for your email invitation from Interim President Fritz to participate in the survey.

FORTNIGHTLY NOTES

For several years, electronic game company Double Fine has held an internal “Amnesia Fortnight” where developers take time off from their regular projects and build prototypes of new, creative ideas. This year, the public was invited to the party: on November 19 a website was launched that allowed visitors to vote on the new material, and the company would put the winning ideas into production.

Everyone is invited and encouraged to submit items related to departmental assessment projects, College institutional effectiveness activities, committee announcements, and best practices by December 17, 2012, for consideration to appear in the next communiqué.