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.

LOOKING AHEAD TO REACCREDITATION AT THE MIDPOINT: THE PERIODIC REVIEW REPORT (PRR)

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education currently has a cycle of accreditation actions that focuses on the decennial self-study and team visit – which the College of Staten Island just completed. After an institution gains its initial accreditation, it enters a ten-year cycle of reaffirmations of its accredited status. The College received its initial Middle States accreditation in 1963; at its June 2012 meeting, the Commission reaffirmed CSI’s accreditation based on the self-study and evaluation team report resulting from the campus visit on April 1-4, 2012.

While the College has been asked to submit a follow-up report by December 1, 2013, that document will address only aspects of Standards 12 (General Education) and 14 (Assessment of Student Learning). However, the institution’s focus must also soon turn to the next major stage of the accreditation cycle, the Periodic Review Report (PRR), which is due in June 2017. As reported in the previous issue of FORTNIGHT, sessions focusing on the PRR were of particular interest to the College’s representatives at the recent Middle States annual conference held in Philadelphia on December 5-7, 2012.

According to current guidelines, the PRR is expected to contain retrospective, current, and prospective elements. It must demonstrate the following: [a] compliance with federal regulations stemming from the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008, and [b] ongoing compliance with Middle States standards.

To comply with federal Title IV requirements, an institution must [1] provide evidence of a process for student identity verification for distance or correspondence education (currently, most institutions do this through a user name/password combination), [2] provide publicly disclosed policies and procedures for the transfer of credit and a list of all articulation agreements (usually these are posted on an institution’s website), [3] provide evidence of an acceptable level of student default rate, and [4] provide policies and procedures for assigning credit hours to all type of courses and programs.

The Periodic Review Report is a peer-reviewed document that is typically accompanied by a small team visit of evaluators: two representatives from peer institutions, 1 financial reviewer, and one HEOA compliance reviewer. Similar to the decennial self-study, the team’s joint response could contain “collegial advice” in the form of suggestions, recommendations that require a response, or requirements that the institution take action if it is seen to be out of compliance with any standard(s) or any part of the HEOA.

Although the Periodic Review Report is not as extensive a project as the decennial self-study, it is no less important in the cycle of accreditation actions. In addition to the federal regulations noted above, an institution must respond to any recommendations deriving from its most recent decennial self-study process – recommendations which may have been made by either the evaluation team or by the institution itself. An institution has the option to respond to items that were listed as “suggestions,” but this is not mandatory. In addition to a response to all recommendations, the PRR is expected to emphasize Middle States Standards...
7 (Institutional Effectiveness), 14 (Assessment of Student Learning), 2 (Institutional Planning, Resource Allocation, and Renewal), and 3 (Institutional Resources).

The Middle States Commission Vice Presidents who presented PRR guidelines at the recent conference also shared some interesting statistics from the 2012 Commission actions stemming from these mid-cycle reports. Of the 40 Periodic Review Reports submitted in 2011-2012, 19 of these received commendations. With regard to follow-up, 10 institutions (25%) were required to submit progress reports and 11 (28%) were assigned monitoring reports; 4 (10%) were placed on warning, meaning that they were considered to be out of compliance with at least one standard. The Middle States standards that generated the most follow-up actions were Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning), responsible for 71% of the follow-up, Standard 7 (Institutional Effectiveness), identified in 43% of follow-up, and Standard 2 (Institutional Planning, Resource Allocation, and Renewal), associated with 33% of follow-up. These results demonstrate the importance of the College’s continued focus on student learning assessment.

The Middle States Commission has recently charged a task force with reviewing the PRR process and format. At present, no changes are in place for institutions which have reports due in 2013 and 2014. It is possible that some elements of the process will change by the time the College of Staten Island reaches this next milestone in 2017.

CLOSING THE LOOP: ASL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTS SUPPLEMENTAL VIDEO QUIZZES TO IMPROVE STUDENT COMPREHENSION

The American Sign Language Program (ASL) in the Department of World Languages and Literatures has been examining student performance on the final Language Competency Test interview (LCT). The program came to the conclusion that while students’ expressive language skills are at the expected proficiency, as determined by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), their receptive skills (comprehension of American Sign Language) are not reaching the desired level.

In an attempt to rectify this situation, the ASL program with the support of its Media Center laboratory, its director Valeria Belmonti, and new language software (OWL), ASL coordinator Dorey Houle and Adjunct Lecturer Katina White developed a series of quizzes consisting of signed videos of varying lengths for all levels of the language. Throughout the semester, students were invited to the lab during class time to complete the quizzes. Early in the semester the faculty members received valuable feedback from the students, which allowed modifications to be made to the remaining quizzes (such as length of time to answer each question and number of times each video could be viewed). These changes improved what students learned from the quizzes, and made their experiences more successful. As a result, faculty have noticed a marked increase in students’ comprehension abilities in the classroom, and they look forward to increased scores on the LCT interviews at the end of this semester.

CAMPUS UPDATES

Academic Outcomes Assessment Committee (AOAC) – The committee, made up of representatives from each academic department and one interdisciplinary programs representative, held its final meeting for the semester on December 11, 2012. Led by its co-chairs, Dr. El Samuels (Education) and Ms. Carol Hartman (Medical Technology and Biology), the committee reviewed the preparation of Assessment Activities Reports for 2011-2012, discussed the Foundations of Excellence project, and focused on the challenges of assessment in interdisciplinary programs. It was decided that steps might be taken to have assessment committees from departments that contribute to interdisciplinary programs meet together with the appropriate Program Director(s) on a somewhat regular basis, to assign responsibilities and share approaches to assessing cross-listed courses or courses that are required for an interdisciplinary major or minor.

FORTNIGHTLY NOTES

Over four weekends from November 23 to December 16, Mendocino County, California, holds a "Festive Fortnight" showcasing galleries, food and wine, light shows, tours and parades, and other holiday-themed events. More information is available at www.visitmendocino.com/festive-fortnight

Everyone is invited and encouraged to submit items related to departmental assessment projects, College institutional effectiveness activities, committee announcements, and best practices by December 19, 2012, for consideration to appear in the next communiqué.