THE PARTNERS FOR CHANGE ADVISING TASK FORCE

By Jim Barron

The Partners for Change Advising Task Force was created in fall 2006 to investigate and address the ways that advising can be made more efficient and effective at MSUB. The primary impetus for this was the result of the Noel-Levitz satisfaction survey, which compared various aspects of the MSUB experience to those from 22 “peer” institutions.

Although MSUB ranked higher than the average of our peer institutions on every question regarding advising (we can be proud of this), the survey also showed that the biggest adequacy gap (difference between optimum and actual levels of service) was most apparent in the area of information control.

Armed with data, the MSU Billings librarians formed a web team and redesigned all of the Library’s web pages — with new colors, easier ways to get to needed information, and simpler pathways to the extensive array of electronic resources available through the Library. In January, the new web pages were activated and announced. Minor adjustments are still being made, and we are encouraging comments.

Students are responding very positively to the new Library web site and its improved navigation. Not everyone is pleased with the changes — some experienced library users find it unsettling that their usual route to a favorite database is now different, for example. We are collecting the comments and tweaking as needed, and we believe that we are documenting the cycle of a real CQI project. Check out the new Library web pages at www.msubillings.edu/library.

Making a difference

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Although MSUB ranked higher than the average of our peer institutions on every question regarding advising (we can be proud of this), the survey also showed that there was a fairly large “gap” between how important students ranked effective advising and our performance in providing that advising. Thus, there seems to be some room for improvement.

The task force consists of 15 members representing all colleges, faculty, staff, administration and students. It is co-chaired by Rita Kratky and Jim Barron, and has met several times since its inception. Some of the topics that we have discussed are listed here.

1 We have looked to the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) to see what they consider “best practices” in advising. One of the primary items to come from this is that they strongly suggest a mechanism for continuous tracking and monitoring of students through the advising process. The implementation of mandatory advising across our campus would seem to be in keeping with NACADA best practices.

2 We are considering several ways to make the advising period more “user friendly” including

» Getting the academic schedule out earlier so that students and advisors can better plan in advance.
» Spreading registration out over a longer period (perhaps three weeks), with seniors registering early in

More on Page 2
the period and freshmen at the end.
» Considering the concept of an “Advising Week” each semester.
» Advising in the residence halls. This is well received by students — we may want to make a greater “outreach” effort for advising.

3 We are considering getting faculty more involved in Summer Orientation and advising for incoming freshmen.
4 Taking full advantage of our existing technology. We feel it is important to provide the registrar with the funds to hire someone to initiate and maintain the full capability of the CAAP system for degree auditing.

5 We have identified six of 22 “peer institutions” that we judged to show a significant commitment to effective advising, and are currently examining those to see exactly what it is that they do that we might want to adopt.

6 We are considering how we might change our Advising website to make it more useful and informative.

These are a sample of the items we have been working on in the Advising Task Force. Stay tuned — your chance to participate is just around the corner!

We plan to send out a voluntary email survey to the university community soliciting suggestions and collecting data regarding our current state of advising at MSUB (i.e. whether it is mandated or not, what the advising loads/faculty are, how they entice their students to see an advisor, etc.). The Advising Task Force hopes to have some firm recommendations by the end of this semester.

The CQI Library Collection
Do you have a question about accreditation or assessment? The CQI Office, located in McMullen 308, has a collection of library books for individuals to use. Visit the CQI website at: www.msubillings.edu/cqi to view the listing of materials (under Activities and Projects).

Standard 5: Library serves a vital role

The academic library is often called the heart of the university — it is an academic support area that is an expected component of every institution of higher education. However, the reality is that libraries vary enormously — consider the difference in size, scope and resources between the library of a major research university and a relatively new tribal college library, for example.

Standard Five gives the framework for evaluating how the library in the institution being (re)accredited supports the mission of that college or university. Sections on Purpose and Scope (5A), Information Resources and Services (5B), Facilities and Access (5C), Personnel and Management (5D) and Planning and Evaluation (5E) are self-explanatory. As there is no specific standard that addresses information and communication technology for the institution, except where it may be covered in Standard 8: Physical Resources, many aspects of computer and network access are also addressed within Standard 5.

Data showing satisfaction with library services, usage statistics, budgetary information, policies and cooperative agreements with other libraries are essential documentation for Standard 5. Numbers of volumes owned, books circulated and questions asked of librarians are now less important than assessment measures designed to show the adequacy of resources, and the use of the library both as a place and as a virtual collection.

The perceived level of support for the teaching and learning functions of the institution is assessed both in Standard 5 and in Standard 2.A.8.

Standard 6: The checks and balances

Standard Six: Governance and Administration is one of the three standards that examine the very heart of the institution. Together with Standard One: Institutional Mission and Goals, Planning and Effectiveness and Standard Nine: Institutional Integrity, Standard Six requires evidence that the institution is well governed and periodically reassesses its purpose in life.

Standard 6A: Governance System looks at how well the institution’s system of governance allows it to accomplish its mission and goals through its policies overseeing the roles, responsibilities and relationships of and among campus constituents. It also examines how well those policies allow consideration of the various constituents’ points of view and reviews policies governing the same kinds of concerns for units in a multi-unit governance system.

Standard 6B: Governing Board evaluates the effectiveness of the institution’s Board in providing oversight for the institution, its chief executive officer, and its mission, policies, funding, budget, finances, staffing, and programs.

Standard 6C: Leadership and Management reviews the performance of the chief executive officer, administration, and staff in achieving the institution’s mission and goals, as well as related issues of disseminating information about institutional research, administrator and staff appointments, and policies for attracting and retaining competent personnel.

Standard 6D: Faculty Role in Governance ensures that faculty have a role in institutional planning and development.

Standard 6E: Student Role in Governance ensures that students have a role in institutional planning and development.

Policy 6.1: Affirmative Action and Nondiscrimination examines the institution’s commitment to policies promoting affirmative action.

Policy 6.2: Collective Bargaining looks at how collective bargaining agreements impact the institution’s overall quality and effectiveness, as well as its compliance with NWCCU standards.
Sleepless in Seattle

By Rachel Schaff er

I t only seemed that way by the time the tired members of the NW Accreditation Steering Committee reached their destination on January 31 after a 2 ½-hour flight delay in Billings. It was 10:30 p.m. Pacific Time when the team finally arrived for a 1 ½-day NWCCU Workshop on Institutional Self-Study.

Although somewhat sleep deprived the next morning, the eight intrepid MSUB participants (see photo) were in attendance bright and early for a full day of plenary sessions and seminars covering the expectations, process, and outcomes of preparing an effective self-study for MSUB’s fall 2008 accreditation visit.

Ron Baker, Executive Vice President of the NWCCU, and a panel of nine presenters from institutions around the region, all highly experienced in the accreditation and evaluation process, welcomed some 150 participants from 35 institutions. The plenary sessions covered the context and framework for self-study, assessment and evaluation of the standards, analysis and synthesis of self-study findings, and a variety of self-study report concerns. The seminars allowed smaller groups of participants to meet with facilitators to discuss more detailed information about preparing and writing the self-study, ask questions, and examine completed self-studies from member institutions. The final topic covered was what to expect during the on-site accreditation visit.

NWCCU designed and executed the workshop with great attention to detail and to the audience’s needs and interests. The information was relevant, well organized, and entertainingly presented. Shortly before the workshop, each participant received a CD containing the workshop PowerPoint presentations, model self-studies, and other supporting materials. That CD will be a valuable resource as work continues on our self-study preparation.

Efforts under way to kick assessment up a notch

By Brent Roberts

I n 2006, caught up in the CQI craze that is sweeping the nation, departments across campus collected data and composed annual reports, reviewing programs and courses and establishing benchmarks as springboards to future improvement.

One result of this process was a cry for help that there be a centralized, campuswide assessment tracking system capable of capturing learning outcomes and program objectives, and providing aggregated data to guide future actions and goals.

Beginning Spring Semester 2007, we are deploying a new assessment and reporting system using eCollege. This process will involve integrating course and program outcomes into the online Gradebook for existing online courses, and creating an eCompanion shell (which looks, behaves, and smells just like a regular online course shell) for each live, on-campus class.

A Team of Ten, led by Brent Roberts, is being trained by eCollege on these operations, and will soon be coming like Prometheus to bring fire to your passion for assessment.

Team members include Susan Baack, Joy Honea, Matt Redinger, Diane Duin, Theresa Kauffmann, Barbara Wheeling, Mike Havens, Sarah Keller, Sharon Hobbs and Christy Low.

THE TIMELINE

Spring 2007
- Team of Ten trains selected Academic Foundations instructors on using assessment reporting system
- Team of Ten begins working with departments to capture program outcomes and implement these into the assessment reporting system

Summer 2007
- Training continues
- August 2007: Back to School Conference
- Stimulating sessions on Student-centered Learning: Integrating Academic Foundations and Program Objectives into the Online Gradebook;

Fall 2007
- All live courses will use an eCompanion shell to supplement classroom learning and track Academic Foundations/program outcomes
- Using the online Gradebook, all online courses will include student learning outcomes assessment measures

Spring 2008
- Data from the assessment and reporting system will be used in the MSU Billings self-study for the October 2008 accreditation visit

and Writing/Improving Program Objectives and student learning outcomes
MSU Billings is poised to grow even more—and gain the resources and influence to chart an exciting future. To accomplish this, we all need to work together in the face of challenging trends.

For example:
did you know that the number of high school graduates in Montana will decrease for the next several years…
or that recruitment and retention efforts at other universities and colleges have been stepped up as a result…
or that Yellowstone County’s low unemployment rate means more students are choosing to work rather than to attend college?

You can make a difference (and feel good about it)

Team Mission:
MSU Billings, the state’s third largest university, is already known for its strong commitment to students. Working together, we can build on our student-centered image. By doing so, we can utilize our exceptional faculty and programs to educate an even larger student population, and enhance our value in the state and in Billings.

Goal: 5,200 students* for Fall 2007
including: first time freshmen, transfer students, re-admitted students, continuing students and graduate students
*includes the Senior Campus and the College of Technology

Your Role:
Be a Part of Recruitment Efforts
1. Participate in Preview Day on the following dates:
   Feb. 9 | March 16
2. Participate in Native American Student Day on February 2
3. Participate in the COT Career Exploration Day on March 22
4. Participate in Transfer Student Day on March 23
5. Participate in MSU Billings Spring Open House in April
6. Participate in Super Sundays (designated days for calling, emailing and chatting with students):
   Feb. 11 | March 18 | April 15 | May 13
7. Join us on our visits in the community and regional area.
8. Participate in prospective student and alumni receptions throughout Montana.
9. Contact prospective students through email, mail, and phone.
10. Sign up to meet with our campus visitors.

For more detailed information on how you can be a part of recruiting new students, contact Partners for Change Recruitment co-chairs Shelly Andersen, at 657-2044, or Gary Amundson, at 657-1610.

Be a Part of Retention Efforts
1. Make sure all of your students—not just freshmen—know their mid-term grades.
2. Refer students having difficulties to the Advising Center and the Academic Support Center and their tutoring services.
3. Encourage your students to form study groups. There are many areas across the campus that would gladly welcome them, including the Academic Support Center.
4. Make students aware of the mentoring program provided by campus organizations such as Student Opportunity Services/TRiO.

For more detailed information on how you can be a part of retaining students, contact Partners for Change Retention co-chairs Gwen Braun, at 657-1714, or Tony Hecimovic, at 657-2210.