

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students

of

Thiel College
Greenville, Pennsylvania

By

A Team Representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Prepared After a Visit to

the Campus on

September 23-24, 2014

The Members of the Team:

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Working with the Team:

Dr. Sean McKittrick, Vice President, Middle States Commission on Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

The team offers its sincere appreciation to Thiel College for hosting this small team visit. The team notes that considerable effort went into the production of the monitoring report, and we thank the members of the Thiel community for their honesty, openness, and commitment to the processes of self-appraisal and self improvement.

Since the 2013 PRR report, the institution has had several leadership changes including new vice presidents in Enrollment Management and College Advancement. As a result of three years of collaborative work by faculty, administration, and the Board of Trustees, a major revision of the core curriculum was approved in 2013 and a partial implementation was launched in fall 2014 with the full implementation scheduled for 2016-17.

REASONS FOR THE VISIT

Thiel College submitted its Periodic Review Report on June 1, 2013. Following peer review and a formal institutional response the Commission acted as follows on November 21, 2013:

To accept the Periodic Review Report and to reaffirm accreditation. To request a monitoring report, due September 1, 2014, documenting further implementation of an organized and sustained assessment process, including the use of direct measures, to improve student learning and overall institutional effectiveness, with evidence that assessment information is used in budgeting and planning (Standards 7 and 14). A small team visit will follow submission of the report. To direct a prompt Commission liaison visit to discuss Commission expectations. The next evaluation visit is scheduled for 2017-2018.

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

During their visit, the small team met with a number of individuals and groups, including:

Cabinet

Troy VanAken, President

Lynn Franken, VP for Academic Affairs/Dean of the College

Jenni Griffin, Associate Academic Dean, Professor of Psychology

Terri Law, VP for College Advancement

Jack Leipheimer, Director of Athletics

Michael McKinney, VP for Student Affairs

Bob Schmoll, VP for Finance and Management

Larry Vallar, VP for Enrollment Management

Kurt Ashley, Chief Information Officer

Linda Nochta, Administrative Assistant

Assessment Steering Committee

Administration:

Lynn Franken, Committee Co-Chair

Jenni Griffin

Faculty:

Mary Theresa Hall, Chair of the Faculty, Professor of English

Michael Balas, Professor of Biology

Bob Batchelor, Associate Professor of Communication

Gary Witosky, Professor of Business Administration and Accounting

Trustees:

Dr. Frank Maenpa

On the phone:

Mr. Mark Benninghoff, Chair, Board of Trustees

Mrs. Connie Danko

Dr. Sarah Taylor-Rogers

Board of Trustees Members in attendance at the Lunch meeting:

In person:

Dr. Barry Stamm

Mr. Fred Haer

Dr. Frank Maenpa

Mr. Barry Oman

Dr. Roy Strausbaugh

On the phone:

Mr. Dale Deist

Mrs. Leah Dever

Mr. Mike Zawoysky

Shared Governance Committee Chairs

Curriculum Study Committee:

Dr. Michael Bray, Chair

Allen Morrill Member

Enrollment Management Committee:

Larry Vallar, Administration, Co-Chair

Dr. David Buck, Faculty, Co-Chair

Promotion and Tenure Committee:

Dr. Ellen Lippert

Faculty Executive Committee:

Dr. Mary Theresa Hall, Chair

Faculty Salaries & Fringe Benefits:

Dr. Matt Morgan, Chair

IPBC:

Bob Schmoll, Administration, Co-Chair

Dr. Chris Stanisky, Faculty, Co-Chair

Academic Administrators

Dr. Jenni Griffin, Assoc. Acad. Dean

Dr. David Buck, Asst. Dean of the Core Curriculum

Institutional Planning & Budgeting Committee (IPBC)

Faculty Members:

Dr. Jared Johnson, Asst. Prof. of English

Dr. Matt Morgan, Prof. of Philosophy

Melissa Oakes, Assoc. Prof. of Business Admin. & Accounting

Dr. Chris Stanisky, Committee Co-Chair & Assoc. Prof. of Chemistry

Dr. Buddy White, Prof. of Philosophy

Staff Members:

Kurt Reiser, Head Football Coach

Bobbi Mutinelli, Asst. Dean of Students/Director of Res. Life

Connie Jablonski, Controller

Homer Bloom, Dir. of Administrative Computing

Sonya Lapikas, Assoc. Dir. of Admissions

Administration:

Bob Schmoll, Committee Co-Chair, VP for Finance & Management

Dr. Lynn Franken, VP for Acad. Affairs/ Dean of the College

Department Chairs and

Associate Academic Dean

Department Chairs:

Dr. Ellen Lippert, Assoc. Prof. of Art

Dr. Sarah Swerdlow, Asst. Prof. of Biology

Prof. David Miller, Prof. of Bus. Admin. & Accounting

Dr. Chris Stanisky, Assoc. Prof. of Chemistry

Dr. Bob Batchelor, Assoc. Prof. of Communication

Dr. Doug Hazlett, Prof. of Education

Dr. Chris Moinet, Prof. of English

Dr. Anna Reinsel, Asst. Prof. of Environ. Science and Chemistry

Prof. Amy Schafer, Health & Phys. Ed.

Dr. David Buck, Prof. of History

Dr. Mercedes Gutiérrez-García, Asst. Prof. of Languages

Prof. Andy Grover, Prof. of Math & Comp. Science

Dr. Greg Butcher, Assoc. Prof. of Neuroscience

Dr. Michael Bray, Prof. of Performing Arts/Music

Dr. Buddy White, Prof. of Philosophy

Dr. Patrick Hecking, Prof. of Physics

Dr. Robert Wells, Prof. of Pol. Sci.

Dr. Laura Pickens, Asst. Prof. of Psych.

Dr. Dan Eppley, Prof. of Religion

Dr. Allan Hunchuk, Prof. of Sociology

Dr. Curt Thompson, Director of the Dietrich Honors Program/Prof. of Religion

Dr. Jenni Griffin, Assoc. Acad. Dean/Prof. of Psychology

TEAM FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Standard 7 Institutional Assessment

The institution was asked to provide documentation of the following:

- *The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.*

In the team's judgment, Thiel College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

- The creation of the strategic plan, *Thiel 2016*, in 2012 was a collaborative process that utilized an assessment and evidenced based approach that tied the College's mission to four "pillars".
- The *Thiel 2016* strategic plan pillars are displayed on large banners on the library building located on the main driveway, and thus has high visibility to the campus community and visitors.
- The *Thiel 2016* Strategic Plan provides a robust framework for institutional assessment including goals, defined outcomes, metrics/analytics, and assigned responsibilities that are clearly linked to budget planning and resource allocation.
- Updates on progress towards the *Thiel 2016* goals are regularly shared with the College community (in unit meetings) and the Board of Trustees. The campus community is well aware of the linkage between the strategic plan goals and objectives and the need to assess outcomes.
- All non-academic departments/units have developed mission statements, goals, and are completing annual assessment reports.
- A benchmark document has been created with key metrics from *Thiel 2016* and is distributed to the campus community following the fall and winter semester census days. Trustees, faculty, and staff confirm the cultural shift to data driven decision making.
- The budget process and resource allocations in the 2014-15 budget were linked to assessment results. Examples include the purchase and implementation of MAP Works software to enhance student retention efforts, the funding of the Honor's Institute, and the new faculty hire in neuro science.

- Several co-curricular areas including the Library, Athletics, and the Learning Commons have demonstrated an impressive level of buy-in to the assessment process and implemented changes based on outcomes. For example, the athletic team retention rates and GPAs are carefully tracked and incorporated into a coach's performance review. The Learning Commons tutoring hours have been adjusted based on the assessment of student usage patterns.
- The new VP of Enrollment Management shares enrollment data openly and effectively with faculty and staff.
- The Board of Trustees conducts a self-assessment after each meeting and institutional assessment data is informing decision-making and resource allocation at the policy level.
- A comprehensive assessment of the College's academic majors by the Austen Group has been completed and shared with faculty to inform ongoing curriculum reform and enrollment/recruiting strategies.
- Following an inclusive process of assessing the College's web site, a redesign was implemented and web analytics are in place to assess its effectiveness.
- A Great Colleges to Work for Committee comprised of faculty and staff regularly surveys employees and in collaboration with the administration have implemented recommendations including the improvement of short-term disability benefits, creation of an online employee directory, and the funding of a professional development.
- Overall, it is promising that the College has moved a great distance in a short period of time in the areas of assessment and institutional effectiveness. The program is useful, truthful, well planned, and seems to be cost-effective.

Significant Accomplishments:

- Information sessions describing the budget process by the Vice President of Finance and Management to the Campus Community that have significantly deepened the understanding of the resource allocation process complemented by the distribution of monthly budget reports.
- The comprehensive external review of residence life, counseling, and intermural using CAS standards by the Vice President of Student Affairs is a great example of the College using best practice.
- An assessment informed comprehensive focus on student retention that has resulted in an 11% improvement in the College's persistence rate in the last two years.

Non-Binding Suggestions:

- Consider reconstituting the membership of the Assessment Steering Committee to differentiate the policy/strategic oversight role of the trustee members from the operational role of the administrators and faculty. The College is urged to further consider the addition of key staff leaders that have proven successes with co-curricular assessment such as the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Athletic

Director, or the Director of the Learning Commons to the Committee, etc. to directly capture this internal expertise.

- “*Rather than engaging an executive to lead the assessment planning and implementation, the College has called upon current leadership in all areas to design, implement, and sustain assessment protocols with one another and all members of the faculty and staff* (Monitoring Report, p. 5).” In the next two years there will be a significant workload associated with the creation of a new strategic plan to succeed *Thiel 2016* (2015-16), as well as the beginning of the self-study process for the 2017-18 Middle States Decennial review (2016-17). The College should consider hiring a specific person or reallocating resources to increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of documenting, organizing and sustaining the assessment process, sustaining both the current program and tackling the upcoming strategic planning and self-study initiatives.
- The College should consider standardizing the templates for academic and institutional annual reports to include a section where faculty and staff can summarize their assessment data while specifying how the results were used in decision-making.

Recommendations:

- The current plan to create a revised institutional assessment plan seems overly redundant to the existing regularized systematic use of the *Thiel 2016* strategic plan with clearly defined goals, metrics, and analytics that are expressly linked to budget planning, and resource allocations.

Requirements:

- None

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

The institution was asked to provide documentation of the following:

- *Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution’s students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.*

In the team’s judgment, Thiel College has not met this standard in terms of evaluation of the core curriculum.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

- The faculty demonstrated intense work to develop strategic learning outcomes (SLOs) for each department in the past year.

- The table on pages 17 through 20 of the September 2014 Monitoring Report clearly provide evidence that the departments are using these SLOs to assess their programs to provide evidence based changes to both their programs and their own SLOs.
- A syllabus template has been adopted across the college that includes the new core curriculum SLOs, the departmental SLOs, and specific course SLOs.
- Departments are involved in a cycle of 5-year program reviews; the first cycle has been completed and shared with both the Associate Academic Dean and the VPAA who examined each review and if needed provided comments to the department.
- The original Integrative Requirements (former general education program) underwent a 5-year review in 2008-2009, where it was determined that they needed to be updated. The VPAA and the faculty undertook this work.
- The Integrative Requirements as demonstrated in Appendix 3 (Monitoring Report) noted that SLOs had not been completed at the institutional level. While it is commendable that faculty used this 2008-2009 5-year review as a basis and catalyst for the core revision, the assessment of student learning between the 2008-2009 review and the launch of the new core in the fall of 2014-2015 could not be documented. In terms of this gap, there was no SLO assessment of the former Integrative Requirements, a curriculum required for all Thiel undergraduate students, while the faculty and administration was working on the development of the new core (2009-2013). The Integrative Requirements curriculum will continue to be taught to current upper level Thiel students until the new core is completely implemented in 2016-17.
- While the 2013 PRR includes a discussion of the core curriculum (pages 47-49) it focused primarily on the revision process of the core curriculum. Neither the 2013 PRR nor the current 2014 Monitoring Report includes student learning outcome (SLO) evidence between 2009 and the time of the team's campus visit.
- A new core curriculum has been developed in conjunction with the Hodges Institute on Teaching and Learning over the past four years. This curriculum was developed with both external professional development and internal dialogues between faculty and both the VPAA and the Associate Academic Dean.
- As a result of these efforts the Detrich Honors Institute has a new and revitalized curriculum that is up and running with a first round of assessment.
- Currently, the first courses within the new core curriculum are being implemented in the Fall of 2014. These courses are based on a seminar format to encourage active learning rather than the traditional lecture formats.
- The delivery of these new core curriculum courses is being staffed with more full time faculty than were used in the former Integrative Requirements general education program.
- Our current finding is that while the new core courses have been launched in the fall of 2014, the development of assessments for this curriculum are incomplete.
- Faculty are energetically involved with assessment at this time, after the work in the Spring of 2014 where they employed their own SLOs, actively evaluated their departmental programs, and created action plans to improve their curriculum and SLOs.

- Faculty reported that they had access to the needed resources to deliver their curriculum and were confident that they could negotiate with the administration and the Planning and Budget Committee should additional resources be needed.
- The new core curriculum includes SLOs but it is the team's determination that these SLOs need to be rephrased to facilitate the meaningful assessment of student learning and linked to student assessment. It is recommended that the faculty engage in the same process with the new core curriculum as was completed in the spring of 2014 and refine these SLOs, focusing on the development of new rubrics and assessments matched to the learning opportunities as they proceed with the implementation of the new core. With the recent appointment of Dr. David Buck to provide direct oversight of the assessment of student learning in the new core curriculum, the team is confident that these challenges will be rapidly resolved.

In conclusion, the team could not substantiate documented evidence that there has been an organized, systematic, and sustained assessment of the general education SLOs following the 2008-2009 5-year review and the implementation of the new core curriculum in the fall of 2014. Given the Commission's standard that the documentation must be focused on the past and present, not intentions or pledges for the future, the team concludes that Thiel is not in compliance with Standard 14 for either the phasing out Integrative Requirements core or the new core curriculum launched in fall 2014.

Significant Accomplishments:

- Appointment of faculty member as the Assistant Dean of the Core Curriculum to oversee the ongoing implementation and assessment of the new core.

Recommendations:

- Collate current assessment activities, data, documents, reports, etc. from academic departments and co-curricular units into a cohesive whole that can be easily accessed by the entire campus community.

Requirements:

- Implementation of an assessment process for the core curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The team again thanks everyone at Thiel College for their hospitality, time and dedication. The team reminds the institution that the information contained in this report, along with the institutional response to these findings, will be reviewed first by the Committee on Follow-Up and then by the full Commission. The team hopes that the College community will be open to the findings contained in this report, all of which are offered in the spirit of collaboration and peer review.