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Recommended Citation

Southwestern Oklahoma State University, "2017 Institutional Effectiveness Survey - University Response and Actions" (2017). *Assessment Center Reports*. 60.

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Institutional Effectiveness: Closing the Loop
*Responses to the 2017 Institutional Effectiveness Survey Summary
Recommendations and Links to Pathways to Excellence Strategic
Plan*

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Institutional Effectiveness: Closing the Loop

On October 24, 2017, SWOSU Assessment and Testing Center released a report on the 2017 Institutional Effectiveness Survey. The Institutional Effectiveness Survey was facilitated by the Office of the Associate Provost and the Assessment and Testing Center. The survey was sent to employees by email in May 2017 and August 2017, with 196 employees responding to the survey. The sample consists of 16% administrative personnel, 38% faculty, and 46% staff. The survey focused on shared governance, communication, and quality of services. The survey evaluated three levels of leadership including executive management, deans and associate deans, and chairs and program directors, as well as institutional units and departments including 18 auxiliary services, 4 co-curricular services, and 22 student services. The Assessment and Testing Center, along with the SWOSU Assessment Committee, analyzed the data, aggregated the findings, and provided eight major areas of findings and suggestions.

The charge from the report was for the institution to use the evidence for continuous improvement. Key personnel were tasked to use the findings to help guide the next strategic plan, as well as annual assessment reviews. Since this report was released on October 24, 2017, the university has used the findings to guide:

- 1) **Annual Assessment Reviews.** A new method of program assessment was instituted in 2017. Each program director uses discussion points generated by this report to analyze the program and provide suggestions for improvement
- 2) **Strategic Plan Creation.** In 2018, the university began the process of creating a new strategic plan. The Strategic Plan Steering Team used these findings to generate discussion and guide surveys of stakeholders. As the new plan was created, the steering team and other entities linked parts of the plan to specific suggestions of respondents to the Institutional Effectiveness Survey.

The following report details 1) a finding/suggestion from the report, 2) the method in which it was addressed between 2017 and 2019, 3) elements of the new strategic plan connected to the finding/suggestion, and 4) linkages to appropriate Higher Learning Commission Criteria for Accreditation.

FINDING:

Executive administration should increase communication with faculty and staff and ensure dialogue occurs earlier in the decision making process. Institutional leadership should also ensure that the communication of information should be consistent amongst leadership personnel. Based on the results, shared governance is part of the institutional culture. Increasing communication with faculty and staff will strengthen an already strong shared governance process. The President is the greatest asset to the institution. The faculty and staff enjoy working with the President and communicating with him about university business, and most specifically, the budget and other institutional challenges.

Deans and Associate Deans were rated as having the most effective communication and shared governance process. The qualitative results revealed that Deans should have more influence overseeing programs and academic activities. Some respondents recommend that the Deans communicate directly with the President. This recommendation is fulfilled by Deans attending ongoing and regular monthly Executive Council meetings facilitated by the President.

Institutional Action from 2017-2019:

Each month, the university holds Executive Council and Administrative Council meetings. The executive council consists of the university administration and the deans of Arts & Sciences; Professional & Graduate Studies; Pharmacy; and Applied and Associate Sciences. The purpose of the meeting is for two-way communication between the administration and the heads of the academic colleges. The Administrative Council consists of university administration and department-head level representatives (about 40 people). The purpose of the meeting is to allow each department on campus to provide updates and for the administration to provide responses to current topics. Each quarter, the university administration holds a VP meeting in order to ensure consistency of communication of information to the public. Twice in the past year, the university president has held a campus-wide meeting to provide information about topics such as budget or the state legislative process. Additionally, the administration hosts a breakfast for all non-faculty staff each fall. All faculty and staff were invited to participate in the development of the Pathways to Excellence Strategic Plan through multiple surveys and other feedback opportunities.

Strategic Plan linkages:

- Strategic Goal Four: Action Point 1: **Provide resources for faculty, staff, and administrators**

HLC Criterion linkages:

- 5.A. Through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution's leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission.
 - 5.A.1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.
 - 5.A.2. The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.
 - 5.A.3. The institution's administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.
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FINDING:

The university bookstore received the poorest rating. The qualitative comments reveal that this has been a problem in the past and continues to be a problem in the present. It is recommended that solutions be explored on how to improve the institutional effectiveness of the campus bookstore.

Institutional Action from 2017-2019:

The university created a Textbook Task Force to investigate best methods of providing resources for students. The task force gave its recommendations in an August 26, 2019, meeting. The university took the recommendations and will proceed with the choice that will provide the most efficient and effective methods of providing textbook resources for students and faculty.

Strategic Plan linkages:

- Strategic Goal Three: Action Point 3.A: Strive to implement key suggestions of the three SWOSU Efficiency Committees.

HLC Criterion linkages:

- 5.A.1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.
 - 5.A.2. The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.
 - 5.A.3. The institution's administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.
 - 5.C.5. Institutional planning anticipates evolving external factors, such as technology advancements, demographic shifts, globalization, the economy and state support.
 - 5.C.6. The institution implements its plans to systematically improve its operations and student outcomes.
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FINDING:

The Alumni office received the second poorest marks in communication along with the Transportation department. In the area of Alumni and Institutional Advancement, faculty and staff are unaware of the services and activities occurring in these areas. Some respondents recommend that the Alumni and Foundation offices increase communication, as well as assist departments with strategies to increase funding and obtaining resources. Transportation department could increase institutional effectiveness by going to an electronic system, as well as upgrading university vehicles.

Institutional Action from 2017-2019:

Each of the past two Springs, the Office of Institutional Advancement (OIA) issues quantitative and qualitative information to each respective SWOSU budget unit regarding the availability of Foundation funding benefitting that unit. This information is designated “Permitted Spending Guidance.” Such Guidance is issued to Academic Department Chairs, Directors, and Deans. On an annual basis the OIA issues university-wide information relative to the Advancement enterprise. Topics are selected based on timeliness, contemporary university focuses, and strategic directions of the OIA and related entities. Multiple times a year the OIA authorizes SWOSU units to conduct fundraising activities as requested. This authorization comes following an application and review process. The OIA works with individual departments and units on fundraising and friendraising efforts targeted to specific university constituencies and stakeholder groups. The Physical Plant coordinates the university’s transportation fleet. Discussions are ongoing about moving to an electronic system for work orders and transportation requests. In the past two years, the Physical Plant has purchased four new Ford transit buses to update the fleet.

Strategic Plan linkages:

- Strategic Goal Three: Action Point 1.A: Strive to implement key suggestions of the three SWOSU Efficiency Committees.
- Strategic Goal Three: Action Point 3.A: Ensure that every Academic and Administrative unit is benefitting from ongoing support from endowed funds by 2027.

HLC Criterion linkages:

- 5.B.1. The institution has qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
- 5.B.3. The institution’s fiscal allocations ensure that its educational purposes are achieved.
- 5.C.1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities, including, as applicable, its comprehensive research enterprise, associated institutes and affiliated centers.
- 5.C.5. Institutional planning anticipates evolving external factors, such as technology advancements, demographic shifts, globalization, the economy and state support.

FINDING:

The majority of the sample verbalized their concern for the International Students and the need for increased services for their orientation to the campus, academic programs, and the community.

Institutional Action from 2017-2019:

Since its inception at SWOSU in July 2012 staff at the International Student Affairs Department (ISA), have considered that one of its primary tasks is to facilitate the adjustment of international students to the social and academic culture of SWOSU. The office added an International Student Affairs Specialist to help with the duties of the Director. It also employs student workers to help with forms and information. English composition sections have been created for international students only. Special sections of Freshman Orientation are available for new international students. These sections are taught by the ISA Director so that curriculum may be tailored to students' needs. The College of Professional and Graduate Studies and Student Affairs partnered to host ongoing Academic Integrity Workshops, resulting in decreased incidents of academic misconduct among international students. The Vice President for Student Affairs together with ISA and SISA sponsor began hosting an International Student Welcome Reception in the fall of 2016. New and returning international students are invited to attend this reception and it is attended by the SWOSU President, Provost, various Deans, many faculty members as well as staff members. Community leaders such as the Weatherford mayor and the Weatherford Chief of Police also attend. These event has continued to grow and is an important gesture on the part of the university and the community to communicate a warm welcome to international students and further integrate them into the SWOSU community. In the fall 2017 additional funding was provided to ISA through the Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA). With this funding the ISA Affairs office has been able to provide services to international students throughout the school year. Each Sunday afternoon a SWOSU van and driver is available to take students shopping or to a local restaurant. On one Saturday each month a SWOSU van takes international students who sign up for the trip to Oklahoma City shopping or just hanging out at a mall. The International Student Affairs office also supports the Southwestern International Student Association (SISA) by funding and helping to organize various events throughout the year.

Strategic Plan linkages:

- Strategic Goal One: Action Point 3.B: Increase minority student support programs.
- Vision Statement narrative: Expanded international programs and opportunities for international students;

HLC Criterion linkages:

- 1.C.2. The institution's processes and activities demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations.
- 5.B.3. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity and provides students with growth opportunities and lifelong skills to live and work in a multi-cultural world.
- 3.D.1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
- 3.D.2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
- 3.D.3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its offerings and the needs of its students.

FINDING:

The most repeated statements reference not having enough faculty and staff. Faculty are feeling overwhelmed by the lack of positions not being filled from retirements; the limited amount of faculty positions being advertised in comparison to staff and administration; pressure to carry a greater teaching load when adjuncts are not available; having more advisees in certain majors; the expectation to recruit students and to ensure retention of students in their teaching discipline. However, the ratings for faculty and academic programs, as noted by course/instructor evaluations, NSSE, and exit graduate surveys, reveal that students are very satisfied with their educational experience, courses, and overall learning experience. Based on the results, it is clear that the distressed budget cycle and faculty challenges are not negatively impacting the students. Some respondents recommend that academic leadership including Deans, Associate Deans, Chairs, and executive leadership identify strategies to assist with these challenges.

Staff also experience the challenges of limited staff. The offices and departments are fulfilling the needed tasks, but with fewer resources. However, faculty, staff, and administrators rate non-academic services excellent to very good. The following departments received the most positive institutional effectiveness ratings: Mail Room, Registrar's office, Public Safety, Payroll, Bursar, Food Services, Enrollment Management, Sponsored Programs, and Dean of Students

Institutional Action from 2017-2019:

Decreases in funding from the state government continued through 2018. Nevertheless, the 20-year record high enrollment in 2017-2018 allowed the university to provide a raise – the first one in several years – for SWOSU employees. In 2019, the state government increased some funds for higher education, but earmarked the increase for faculty raises. As a result, the university has been able to provide raises for faculty twice in the last year. Although this does not alleviate pressure from staffing issues, it does provide support for faculty needing to juggle several duties. The university is constantly discussing ways to keep the quality of the institution high while not overburdening its excellent staff and faculty.

Strategic Plan linkages:

- Strategic Goal Four: Action Point 1.A: Increase salaries for faculty, staff, and administrators to a higher percentage of CUPA averages to attract and retain dedicated staff and scholar-teachers.
- Strategic Goal One: Action Point 1.B: Coordinate training of all new hires and positions, including department chairs, deans, and administrative assistants.

HLC Criterion linkages:

- 3.C.2. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance, assessment of student learning; and establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff.
- 5.B.1. The institution has qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
- 5.B.3. The institution's fiscal allocations ensure that its educational purposes are achieved.
- 5.C.1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities, including, as applicable, its comprehensive research enterprise, associated institutes and affiliated centers.
- 5.C.5. Institutional planning anticipates evolving external factors, such as technology advancements, demographic shifts, globalization, the economy and state support.

FINDING:

Some faculty are overwhelmed with a large number of advisees. Students receive information, but are still unsure (such as, how to resolve “holds”). The Advisement Handbook is not adequate training for Advisors. When faculty advise a student outside the department, the student may not always be getting correct information. Students seem hesitant to speak to their Advisor, especially if they have trouble contacting him/her.

Institutional Action from 2017-2019:

SWOSUConnect (formerly Freshman Orientation) is undergoing a change and will have much more information on advising and enrollment. It will also be a full semester and will allow us to follow up with students who have not yet enrolled for the following semester. The university has expanded advising by Zoom, by phone, and by email with great success. The Advisement Handbook will be updated with specific information on Holds. The new Colleague system is allowing students to plan schedules and consult with their advisor in a variety of ways to plan for multiple semesters. Faculty members and department chairs have completed several trainings in the new system in order to be more efficient and effective advisors. Additional trainings have been scheduled throughout the next year. The university is pursuing grant opportunities and other funding initiatives to make possible the undecided advising center.

Strategic Plan linkages:

- Strategic Goal One: Action Point 2.b: Implement advising and informational methods that will retain a higher percentage of students who begin as Undecided majors.
- Strategic Goal One: Action Point 2.c: Design more robust Orientation initiatives for transfer and online students.
- Strategic Goal One: Action Point 3.c: Develop a centralized office for freshman student advising to include alternatively admitted students and sophomore students with remaining subject deficiencies.
- Strategic Goal One: Action Point 3.d: Extend communication and support services to incoming freshmen and transfer students for entire first year at SWOSU.
- Strategic Goal One: Action Point 1.b: Coordinate training of all new hires and positions, including department chairs, deans, and administrative assistants.
- Strategic Goal One: Action Point 1.c: Expand training and orientation opportunities for new and existing faculty.

HLC Criterion linkages:

- 3.C.2. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance, assessment of student learning; and establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff.
- 5.B.1. The institution has qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
- 4.C.1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence and completion that are ambitious, attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations and educational offerings.
- 4.C.2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.
- 4.C.3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.