

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION
HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION ACCREDITATION AT
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Action Requested: Receive the accreditation report from Iowa State University.

Executive Summary: Iowa State University (1) engaged in a two-year self-study process that addressed the criteria for accreditation defined by the accrediting body; and (2) had an on-site visit by consultant-evaluators. The University was accredited for the full period allowed by the accrediting body without interim reports or visits required.

Background:

- ◇ **Description.** In the United States, colleges voluntarily seek accreditation from nongovernmental bodies. Institutional accreditation is provided by a regional association. An institutional accrediting agency evaluates an entire educational organization in terms of its mission and the agency's standards or criteria and accredits the organization as a whole.
- ◇ **Accrediting Agency.** The accrediting body is The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association. The HLC provides two programs for maintaining accredited status – the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) and the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). ISU chose to participate in the PEAQ.
- ◇ **Review Process.** The self-study prepared by the University addressed the five major criteria for accreditation – mission and integrity; preparing for the future; student learning and effective teaching; acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge; and engagement and service.
- ◇ **On-Site Team Report.** In May 2006, the visiting team determined that the University met all the criteria required for accreditation.
- ◇ **Sample Commendations Identified by the Visiting Team.**
 - ☑ “An unswerving commitment to advancing its mission as a land-grant institution.”
 - ☑ “A student-centered learning approach to education.”
 - ☑ “A nationally-recognized program of learning communities.”
 - ☑ “Efficient use of limited resources.”
 - ☑ “Widespread support of the president and the administrative leadership of the institution.”
 - ☑ “Highly engaged and articulate student leadership.”

◇ Specified Core Components that need organizational attention.

- ☑ “Although the university has responded well to overall declines and fluctuations in its resource base, an area of concern relates to the rates of decline in the extension budget from state and federal sources.”
- ☑ “Decentralization of assessment places responsibility for success on unit level faculty and staff resources, resulting in considerable variation in achievement of full implementation of the institutional strategic priorities. While student learning outcomes assessment is fully embraced at the university level, progress is uneven at the operational level.”
- ☑ “In its Strategic Plan, *Forward Thinking*, strengthening graduate education is identified as a priority. To fully achieve its potential, the university will need to address several issues related to coordination and additional graduate student support.”

◇ Institutional Responses to Issues Identified by the Visiting Team.

- ☑ “Extension clearly continues to be an integral part of Iowa State University as evidenced by its prominence in the current institutional strategic plan, the importance attached to the recent appointment of a new vice provost for extension and outreach, and continuing discussions and planning for a new budget model for the university that incorporates fully the resource needs of extension. The central leadership of the university and extension are collaborating to develop a new budget model that builds a solid resource base for extension utilizing both conventional and non-conventional funding sources, including user fees when appropriate.”
- ☑ “The recent appointment in 2005 of a continuous academic program improvement coordinator charged with coordinating, systematizing, and enhancing continuous improvement processes, including student outcomes assessment, is a major commitment to more systematic and centrally coordinated approaches to assessment. The coordinator is leading efforts to refine and enhance student outcomes assessment across campus through initiatives with the academic colleges, as part of the periodic academic program review process, and as part of related ongoing large-scale data collection efforts such as the Cooperative Institutional Research Program and National Survey of Student Engagement surveys. Training and development opportunities pertaining to outcomes assessment for faculty members are also being expanded, including sending 11 faculty and staff members to the Alverno Institute on Assessment during Summer 2006, adding new components on outcomes assessment in programming for new faculty members, and developing additional external funding for direct assessment initiatives.”
- ☑ “The Dean of the Graduate College, supported by a strong leadership team in the Graduate College and Office of the Provost is working to enhance the coordinating and support for graduate programs. Interdisciplinary/interdepartmental graduate programs are supported centrally by the Graduate College, and the Dean of the Graduate College is collaborating with the academic college deans, their associate deans for graduate programs, and the departmental directors of graduate programs to provide adequate support for graduate programs. The university has just completed transition to a funding model that will provide full tuition scholarships for all Ph.D. students who are appointed to graduate assistantships. The new budget model that is under development will include mechanisms to provide adequate fiscal support for graduate programs. The Graduate Dean and leadership team of the Graduate College meet regularly with the departmental directors of graduate education, the academic college associate deans for academic programs, and the interdisciplinary/interdepartmental graduate program directors to collaborate on the solution of issues involving graduate education and its support at ISU.”

- ◆ Accreditation Status. In September 2006, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association awarded continued accreditation to Iowa State University for the maximum period of ten years without required interim reports or visits.

This report addresses the following priorities in the Board's Strategic Plan – "ensure high-quality educational opportunities for students (1.0); discover new knowledge through research, scholarship, and creative activities (2.0); provide needed service and promote economic growth (3.0); and demonstrate public accountability and effective stewardship of resources (4.0)."

Details about the accreditation report are available in the Board Office.