

Fifth Year Interim Review Referral Report

Submitted to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

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On Behalf of:

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Core Requirement 2.8 Faculty

The number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the mission of the institution and to ensure the quality and integrity of its academic programs.

Referral Citation:

"The institution presented aggregate data for the number of full-time and part-time faculty at the institution level. University-wide student to faculty ratio data was discussed. In addition, the institution presented data at the department level for numbers of faculty within a department. Although the aggregate number of full-time faculty may appear adequate, it could not be determined that the distribution of faculty across programs will ensure the quality and integrity of each academic program. Information describing the size of the programs in terms of courses offered, students served, or credit hours generated were not presented. A further report is requested and should address the distribution of full-time faculty across programs relative to the size of those programs. Document that the number of full-time faculty at the program level/discipline area is adequate to support the mission of the institution and to ensure the quality and integrity of its academic programs, including those at the institution's five off-site locations (Henderson, Hopkinsville, Madisonville, Paducah and Fort Campbell)."

Response to Judgment of Compliance:

In compliance

Narrative of Compliance:

In its Fifth-Year Interim Report, <u>Murray State University</u> (MSU) provided information about the quality and number of faculty (Core Requirement 2.8). In response, reviewers noted that additional information was needed pertaining to the distribution of faculty across programs, size of programs, and other requested information. Therefore, MSU submits the following additional narrative, documentation, supplemental tables, and links to comply with the request for information.

MSU, a Carnegie Masters Level "L" institution, is comprised of a faculty body that is both rich in academic excellence and quality, as well as diverse across the academic fields represented in its five academic colleges and two schools. The <u>MSU Mission and Statement of Purpose</u> highlights not only teaching, research, and service, but also those attributes desired for support of a comprehensive institution. As a part of fulfilling the university's mission, the MSU faculty support thirteen (13) associate, sixty-two (62) baccalaureate, and

thirty-nine (39) master's programs, as well as one (1) specialist program. In the 2009 calendar year, four hundred and twelve (412) full-time faculty were instrumental in awarding 2,190 degrees with seventy percent (70%) of them represented by undergraduate programs, supporting a six-year graduation rate of 49.6% for the university. Additionally, in 2009, the university budgeted \$49,503,194 for instruction comprising forty-five percent (45%) of total university expenditures, not including research or public service expenditures.

The Faculty Body (Fall 2009)

MSU, a student-centered academy, is comprised of four hundred and twelve (412) full-time faculty, of which fifty-nine percent (59%) are male and forty-one percent (41%) female (*MSU Fact Book*). The university's ranked faculty include twenty-five percent (25%) holding the rank of professor, twenty-four percent (24%) associate professor, twenty-nine percent (29%) assistant professor, and twenty-two percent (22%) lecturer. Of full-time faculty, ninety-nine percent (99%) of professors, ninety-three percent (93%) of associate professors, ninety-one percent (91%) of assistant professors, and twenty-three percent (23%) of lecturers hold the terminal degree for their fields, respectively. Overall, seventy-eight percent (78%) of full-time faculty hold the terminal degree. Moreover, fifty-one percent (51%) of the full-time instructional faculty hold tenure.

The <u>2010 U.S. News and World Report Rankings</u> highlighted MSU's faculty-to-student ratio of 1:16. This low faculty-to-student ratio is synonymous with MSU's mission of being a comprehensive university with a predominant emphasis on teaching. Supplementing this low faculty-to-student ratio is a library staff which includes nine and one-half (9.5) faculty librarians and twenty-two (22) exempt/hourly staff members.

Faculty Hiring Procedures and Faculty Personnel Files

I. Faculty Hiring

Faculty at MSU are hired in accordance with established practices of the Office of Human Resources as outlined in the *Hiring Procedures for Faculty and Exempt Professional Staff Guidelines*. By using peer-review in the hiring process, the university strives to ensure that quality is paramount in the screening of applicant qualifications and credentials, thus yielding the best candidate possible.

II. Faculty Personnel Files

To comply with the highest of standards in appointment, promotion, tenure, suspension, and dismissal of faculty, MSU maintains personnel records on all faculty. The essential contents and location of these files are kept in accordance with Section 2.4, Personnel Records, of the MSU Faculty Handbook.

Faculty Definitions and Policies on Rank, Degree Requirements, Graduate Membership, and Professional Ethics

For the purposes of ensuring quality and integrity of the faculty body, MSU utilizes policies and practices of the *Faculty Handbook* as adopted by the MSU Board of Regents. *Faculty Employment Policies and Procedures* are published in Chapter Two of the *Faculty Handbook* and entail policies on Faculty Rank, Academic Qualifications, Criteria for Faculty Graduate Membership, and Terminal Degree Categories for Appropriate Faculty Course Assignments.

Section 2.1, <u>Faculty Definitions</u>, <u>Ranks</u>, <u>and Titles</u>, of the *Faculty Handbook*, outlines policies establishing ranks and titles of both regular and special appointment faculty. The <u>academic qualifications</u> for faculty are presented in the university's Academic Promotion Policy, Section 2.6.

Section 2.1.4 outlines <u>Terminal Degree Categories and Appropriate Course Assignments</u> as adopted by the MSU Board of Regents in accordance with <u>SACS/COC Faculty Guidelines</u>. Relative to each of these categories, fifty percent (50%) of university faculty are qualified to teach graduate and post-graduate coursework, forty percent (40%) to teach baccalaureate classes, and less than two and one-half percent (< 2.5%) are categorized as other (associate degrees and graduate assistantships). Clearly, the university emphasizes the highest two categories and strives to maintain the highest level of credentialing standards for its faculty.

To further supplement the *MSU Mission and Statement of Purpose*, and in an effort to achieve many of those stated values, many faculty carry state or national professional licensure(s) and credentials, which further emphasize the professional values in the respective disciplines. A small initial sampling conducted in Fall 2009 demonstrated that the university employed one or more faculty who held the following professional licenses: Certified Public Accountant, Certified Governmental Financial Manager, Attorney, Licensed Professional Engineer, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Licensed Social Worker, Licensed Dietician, Licensed Psychologist, Licensed Audiologist, Licensed Speech Language Pathologist, Registered Nurse, Licensed Veterinarian, Licensed Veterinary Technologist, Licensed Professional Land Surveyor, Licensure with the American Institute of Architects, and Licensure with the American Society of Interior Designers, among others.

Additionally, Section 2.1.3.1 of the *Faculty Handbook*, which outlines the Minimum Criteria for Membership to the Graduate Faculty, demonstrates MSU's dedication to ensuring appropriate qualifications for instruction in its master's degree programs. In fall 2009, two hundred ninety-two (292) or seventy percent (70%) of university faculty were qualified as members of the Graduate Faculty.

MSU also utilizes adjunct and part-time faculty to accomplish its mission as outlined in Section 2.1.2.3, <u>Adjunct Faculty/Part-time Faculty</u>, of the *Faculty Handbook*. In fall 2009, the university roster included one hundred forty-nine (149) instructional faculty in adjunct/part-time positions. To ensure quality, all part-time and adjunct faculty continue to be subject to the same guidelines and review procedures as full-time faculty in compliance with terminal degree

categories in the determination of appropriate course assignments as stated in Section 2.1.4.

Additionally, in the fall of 2009, the university employed upwards of two hundred (200) graduate assistants in teaching, research, and public service; of these, forty-seven (47) held teaching assistantships. To determine the suitability of the student to teach or assist with teaching a course, he/she must meet the MSU Guidelines for Graduate Teaching Assistants, Categories D and E, as stated in Section 2.1.4.

MSU has policies relating to a <u>Code of Professional Ethics</u> to support the personal and academic integrity of all faculty members and academic programs. These ethics policies are listed in Section 2.9.2 of the *Faculty Handbook*. Other policies relating to faculty governance may be viewed in Chapter Two.

Responsibilities of the Faculty, Annual Faculty Course Loads, Full-Time Equivalencies, Evaluation, Research, and Service

MSU is a comprehensive university with faculty professional duties of teaching, research, and service that are directly linked to the institutional *Mission and Statement of Purpose*. Presently, the university utilizes a course load of twelve (12) hours per semester on a nine-month standardized faculty contract extending from August 15 – May 15. Some disciplines do have a reduction in course loads and/or alternative arrangements to account for other professional circumstances and academic accreditations.

<u>Table 1</u>, Full-Time Equivalency (FTE), exhibits the university faculty body categorized by college/school, the department of membership, and each faculty member's percentage of teaching load calculated as full-time teaching equivalency (FTE) in fall 2009. Most faculty members hold full-time teaching (FTE) assignments. Other qualified instructional staff support program needs.

The university utilizes several faculty evaluation methods to strengthen and to continuously assess the quality of teaching among its faculty. Section 2.5, Annual Evaluation Policy, of the *Faculty Handbook* outlines fundamental policy expectations and allows for a system of evaluation based on a variety of validated measurements. MSU uses the University of Washington Instructional Assessment System (IAS) to evaluate courses taught by faculty. The system collects and reports student ratings of all academic instruction. Courses taught by lecturers and non-tenured faculty are evaluated every semester, while courses taught by tenured faculty are evaluated on an every-other-semester rotation.

The quality and productivity of faculty are demonstrated by the pursuit and award of research and grant funding supporting the institutional mission. The attached report, entitled <u>Grants Awarded July 1, 2009</u>, thru <u>December 31, 2009</u>, represents the six-month period of July 1, 2009 to December 31, 2009, when the university, led by its faculty, was awarded \$5,108,746 in competitive funding from regional and national sources. This externally funded research is representative of the quality, reputation, and excellence of the MSU faculty in support of the university's commitment to provide research opportunities for its students and faculty.

To further meet the *Mission and Statement of Purpose*, university faculty continue to provide a myriad of public service activities to the region, throughout

the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and to disciplines represented among the university's academic and student affairs programs.

Faculty Teaching in Programs with Professional Discipline Accreditations

In addition to the university's ongoing accreditation by SACS/COC, many of the university's programs are enriched by specific institutional and professional accreditations from over twenty-one other accrediting bodies of academic disciplines (*MSU Fact Book*, p.32). Consequently, over fifty-six percent (56%) of the university's full-time faculty are compliant with other professional accrediting standards. These additional accreditations further assure an adequate balance of university resources in regard to faculty numbers, quality, and instructional resources in a variety of program areas. When accrediting standards differ, MSU complies with the more stringent standard.

Documentation of the Size of Programs, Number of Courses Offered, Students Served, and Faculty-to-Student Ratio

Specific to the request of the prior reviewers, <u>Table 2</u>, Academic Department Level Data, presents information related to the size of academic departments, the number of courses available within the academic catalog, the number of courses offered in the fall of 2009, the number of full- and part-time faculty affiliated with those departments, the student head-count, and the faculty-to-student ratio. As exhibited in Table 2, the university, in general, has adopted a significant number of total courses within its academic catalog to ensure that faculty not only teach a core of university studies/general education courses, but also a diversity of discipline-specific courses. Consequently, the university offered a breadth of courses (listed in the academic catalog) during the fall 2009 semester; moreover, these courses were taught by qualified faculty.

Table 2 also lists the number of full-time and part-time faculty within each academic department. Furthermore, the last three columns of Table 2 display student head-count and faculty-to-student ratios for each academic area. While the university highlights an overall faculty-to-student ratio of 1:16, it does not account for target ratios in its mission or internal policy documents. Rather, the university formally reviews each program ratio as a part of its Academic Program Review. Internal to this review, a variety of metrics is used to determine an appropriate number and balance of faculty within academic departments. Some examples include staffing trends, tenure and promotion cycles, consultation with discipline-specific experts within programs, industry practices, student needs, program size, and funding. The results of this review by the Provost are checked by the Executive Committee of the University Academic Council and then provide the basis for needed adjustments made under the auspices of the Offices of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and the University President.

Distribution of Full-Time Faculty Across Programs Relative to the Size and Student Credit Hours of Departments and Programs

MSU also exhibits a balance of faculty in each specific program within academic departments. <u>Table 3</u>, Distribution of Full-Time Faculty Across Programs Relative to the Size and Student Credit Hours of Departments and

Programs, highlights fall 2009 data. The data presented for each program affirm the number of full-time faculty to student credit hours (SCH) generated. Specifically, column 2 of Table 3 illustrates that seventy-three (73) of the main campus programs listed have a high percentage (>70%) of their undergraduate student credit hours (SCH) taught by full-time faculty at the departmental level. Column 5 further documents that the university is staffed with high numbers of full-time faculty in relationship to student credit hours generated for graduate programs within each academic department.

Data represented in Table 3 do, however, present a higher number and percentage of student credit hours (SCH) taught by part-time faculty in some extended campus programs. Within Table 3, the highest percentage of part-time faculty is clustered within <u>College of Education</u> programs at the extended campuses. However, the College of Education continues to maintain an overarching low faculty-to-student ratio in its three departments of Adolescent, Career, and Special Education (1:19); Early Childhood and Elementary Education (1:11); and Educational Studies, Leadership, and Counseling (1:10) [Source: Table 1].

The College of Education strives to maintain high levels of program quality regardless of where or how a program is delivered. The College of Education maintains the same student learning outcomes for all locations to preserve continuity between its main campus programming and programs offered at the extended sites.

To ensure faculty quality at the extended campuses, the College of Education employs terminally-degreed program coordinators who oversee curriculum, evaluation, and programmatic systems at each of the sites. Several part-time faculty teaching at the extended locations also hold the terminal degree, specifically those at Hopkinsville and Madisonville, Kentucky. Site coordinators follow policies set by Teacher Education Services for the placement of field and clinical experiences in terms of the qualifications of supervisors, length of experience, assignments, and exercises. Field experiences are evaluated regularly, with results reviewed by decision makers on a yearly basis. The coordinator of the Paducah, Kentucky, site, holds the MAED degree with Rank I certification (30 hours above), has strong ties to the public school systems in the area, serves as Secretary to the Kentucky Council for Exceptional Children, has been honored as a Max Carman Outstanding Teacher by the MSU Student Government Association, and was a recipient of the Board of Regents Award for Teaching Excellence [see memo from the Dean of Continuing Education and Academic Outreach on further explanation of regional campuses].

To further ensure quality, yearly training sessions for adjunct faculty at the extended campuses review the content of courses and key assessments used to collect student data for accreditation and provide common student learning outcomes.

In 2009, the College of Education was once again fully accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) as noted in the May 8, 2009, Reaccreditation Notification Letter, and with the partial excerpt:

...the Unit Accreditation Board of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) considered the application for continuing accreditation of the College of Education as the unit that oversees the professional education offerings at Murray State University. I am pleased to inform you of the Unit Accreditation Board's decision to continue the accreditation of the College of Education at Murray State University at the initial teacher preparation and advanced preparation levels. This accreditation decision indicates that the unit and its programs meet rigorous standards set forth by the professional education community.

The <u>NCATE Accreditation Action Report</u> states that all standards were met, drawing attention, specifically, to those of faculty qualifications, performance, and development. Moreover, the report indicated that there were no areas of improvement required; the strongest affirmation of program quality possible.

Overall, efforts to maintain quality at remote sites have proven successful as the pass rates for national teacher content and pedagogy exams have been the same for the main campus and extended sites. As displayed in the Comparison of Standardized Test Scores, there were no significant differences between the standardized examination scores of students at the main campus and those at extended campuses, especially on the Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT) and the Praxis Examination.

Supporting Narrative Extracted from Original 5th Year Interim Report

Murray State University's mission also governs specific qualifications of faculty. Consistent with the international focus of our mission, over 50% of reporting faculty are <u>internationally current</u>, having taught courses with an international focus and/or taught abroad, conducted research with an international orientation, and/or provided service having an international dimension to the university or region. Similarly, MSU's dedication to student involvement in community outreach and <u>service learning</u> can be seen in the 11 faculty members serving 464 students in 14 service learning classes offered in the fall 2009 semester. MSU's strong extended campus and online presence, mirroring our interest in accessibility and regional responsibility, fosters faculty commitment to distance learning. Thirty-three faculty members, representing five colleges or schools, <u>taught via ITV</u> in Fall 2009. Seventy faculty members offered 106 <u>online courses</u> in the fall 2009 semester; moreover, 75% of those faculty members taught online courses as part of their normal course load.

Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 Institutional Effectiveness: Educational Programs

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of results in the following area: educational programs, to include student learning outcomes.

Referral Citation:

"The institution provided detailed information about its assessment system, along with four acceptable examples for the year 2005-2006 assessment cycle, as well as the preliminary reports for the 2009-2010 academic year. However, reports for 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years were inaccessible via the web links provided. Document that educational programs identify program-level student learning outcomes, demonstrate the extent to which the students achieve those outcomes and provide evidence of improvement based on the analysis of the results."

Response to Judgment of Compliance

In compliance

Narrative of Compliance:

In its Fifth-Year Interim Report, <u>Murray State University</u> (MSU) provided information about the assessment of educational programs (Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1). Reviewers noted:

The institution provided detailed information about its assessment system, along with four acceptable examples for the 2005-2006 assessment cycle, as well as the preliminary reports for the 2009-2010 academic year. However, reports for 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years were inaccessible via the web links provided.

Accordingly, reviewers asked MSU to "document that educational programs identify program-level student learning outcomes, demonstrate the extent to which students achieve those outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on the analysis of the results" for those two academic years (2006-2007 and 2007-2008). MSU submits the following narrative and supplemental materials to provide this requested information.

Identification of Program-Level Student Learning Outcomes

In 2005, MSU introduced the SMART (sharpen/set goals, map the curriculum, assess, review results, transfer) Report, a new approach to assessing

Referral Report Page | 8

student outcomes, which coincided with and built upon the university's work in mapping the curriculum to the <u>Characteristics of the Murray State Graduate</u>. The <u>SMART Report</u> format prompts undergraduate academic programs to identify specific student learning outcomes directly related to programmatic learning goals (see <u>sample SMART Report form</u> and <u>Student Learning Outcomes</u> for the individual academic programs). The first step of the template provided by the SMART Report, "sharpen learning goals into outcomes and set achievement targets," elicits lists of relevant learning goals matched with appropriate, concrete, measurable targets that will be assessed that year.

For example, the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications (JMC) used the core values and learning objectives determined by their external accrediting agency, the *Characteristics of the Murray State Graduate*, and a revised departmental mission statement to identify their learning outcomes for 2006-2007. JMC's mission is to "prepare students with a body of knowledge and a system of inquiry, scholarship and training for careers in which they are accountable to the public interest for their knowledge, ethics, competence and service; citizens, clients and consumers for their competencies and the quality of their work; and employers for their performance." JMC expects their students to learn how to write clearly and accurately, use media technology appropriate to the task, apply media theory in presenting images and information, engage in research and critical evaluation, understand data and statistics, and think creatively and analytically. Accordingly, JMC's Public Relations program identified the following learning outcome for 2006-2007:

Learning Outcome:

Public relations students will identify the ability to produce written materials applicable to public relations situations. This outcome is related to the **Learning Goal of Expressing Ideas Clearly When Communicating in Writing**. The achievement target for 2006-2007 is that eighty percent (80%) of public relations students will rate "Exemplary" or "Proficient" as evaluated by the JMC Written Presentation Rubric.

This learning outcome specifically relates to the departmental mission, the <u>first Characteristic of the Murray State Graduate</u> ("Engage in mature, independent, and creative thought and express that thought effectively in oral and written communication"), and JMC departmental learning goals.

In the same way, every major and program identified student learning outcomes with measurable achievement targets ("S" in the SMART report format), mapped the learning outcome to the curriculum being taught that year ("M" in the SMART report format), and identified how, specifically, the outcome would be assessed ("A" in the SMART report format) for the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years (see 2007-2008 SMART plans). The University Assessment Committee then reviewed the plans to achieve two institutional aims: matching learning outcomes with achievement targets and program-specific learning goals, and making achievement targets clear, relevant, and measurable (see sample reviewer sheet). Feedback was

Referral Report Page | 9

provided for all plans, and revision of some plans was required. Coordinated by the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, this oversight ensured that while each academic unit determined the most appropriate assessment of student learning outcomes for the unit, there was campus-wide consistency, facilitating institutional reporting.

Student Achievement of Outcomes

In the 2006-2007 academic year, MSU departments and programs used the SMART process to identify student learning outcomes, assess the extent to which students met the outcomes, and improve academic programs (see 2006-2007 SMART reports). The results show that during the 2006-2007 academic year, academic units met one hundred and fifty-eight (158) achievement targets of the one hundred and ninety-eight (198) planned. The following examples illustrate the achievement of student learning outcomes for the 2006-2007 academic year:

I. Agricultural Science

To measure the achievement of a learning goal of demonstrating proficiencies in the specific area of plant science, the Department of Agricultural Science identified three student learning outcomes: students will demonstrate competencies in knowledge of plant anatomy and nomenclature with the goal of seventy-five percent (75%) of students demonstrating knowledge of this material embedded in course assignments and exams; students will demonstrate competencies in knowledge of plant propagation and life cycles with the goal of sixty-five percent (65%) of students demonstrating knowledge of this material embedded in lab assignments and exams; and students will demonstrate competencies in the impact of cultural and environmental factors with the goal of seventy percent (70%) of students demonstrating knowledge of this material embedded in exams. Pretests and posttests were administered to determine student learning. The pretest in the area of plant science resulted in an overall average score of forty-four percent (44%); at the end of the course, students scored an average of seventy-seven (77%), meeting the achievement target and demonstrating student learning. The pretest in the area of plant anatomy and nomenclature resulted in an overall average score of thirty-five percent (35%); at the end of the course, students scored an average of seventy-seven (77%), exceeding the achievement target and demonstrating student learning. The pretest in the area of cultural and environmental factors resulted in an overall average score of forty-three percent (43%); at the end of the course, students scored an average of eighty-six percent (86%), exceeding the achievement target and demonstrating student learning.

II. Engineering Physics

The Department of Engineering and Physics identified student learning outcomes measuring students' acquired abilities in three areas: engineering problem solving; system, component, or process

Referral Report Page | 10

design; and communication skills. Students met the benchmarks for two of the three student learning outcomes; all students were evaluated at satisfactory levels on rubrics assessing design projects and oral and written communication skills. While fifty percent (50%) of the students scored above fifty percent (50%) on the departmental exit exam, and thus met expectations for engineering problem solving, only forty percent (40%) of students passed the nationally-normed Fundamentals of Engineering exam, a pass rate below the national average, and thus did not meet the achievement target. The department reviewed the topic-specific results, determining that electricity and magnetism topics were relative weaknesses, and planned to review specific exam questions to further identify areas that could be addressed in course pedagogy.

Departments and programs created SMART plans for the 2007-2008 academic year (see 2007-2008 SMART plans); however, assessment reports for 2007-2008 were not submitted in the fall of 2008 because of the intensive and university-wide efforts to realign assessment underway in the 2008-2009 academic year. After several years of using the SMART format, academic units across campus reported that the format was neither effective nor efficient in many cases. Therefore, the Assessment Committee suspended assessment temporarily and worked with academic units to develop a new process that worked for the entire university. This decision was fueled in part by the realization that the SMART plan and format were created by administrators with no contributions from the academic units who would be using the plan; to rectify this limitation, the new institutional assessment process was based on input from academic units and administrators familiar with SACS/COC requirements and best practices in assessment. This realization about the need for alternative approaches to assessment and the limitations of the 2004 Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) were discussed in the Fifth-Year Interim Report.

Evidence of Improvement

Because MSU values a university-wide culture of continuous reflection and evaluation that results in improvement of student learning, analysis of assessment data provides a basis for improvement of educational programs. Although imperfect, the SMART report format was valuable in that it asked academic units to review the results by evaluating the evidence and comparing the results against the achievement targets, taking into consideration the context of the learning outcome, departmental learning goals, and events of the academic year. Moreover, the SMART report prompted academic units to transfer information into action by using the results to improve teaching and learning, through informing changes in curriculum, faculty development/support, and/or future assessment efforts. MSU believes that the single most important aspect of student learning outcomes assessment is the conversation that takes place among faculty about student learning in their departments or programs. Accordingly, programmatic improvement based on assessment results normally occurs after a department-wide or program-wide discussion of the assessment results and their implications.

Referral Report Page | 11

Of the forty-four (44) programs that completed SMART Reports for 2006-2007, sixty-four (64%) indicated that they made programmatic changes based on assessment results (see <u>SMART Reports 2006-2007</u>). Over seventy-nine percent (79.8%) reported that they met their 2006-2007 learning goal targets. Of those programs that met their targets, fifty-eight percent (58%) selected new outcomes for 2007-2008.

The following examples highlight the improvement of learning and teaching based on analysis and discussion of 2006-2007 assessment of student learning outcomes:

I. Economics

The Economics program identified four learning outcomes: assessing fundamental knowledge, problem-solving skills, technology skills, and communication skills, and set a goal of eighty percent (80%) of students meeting a benchmark of "acceptable" performance on assignments in two upper-level economics courses. Three of the benchmarks were exceeded; however, students did not meet the benchmark for fundamental knowledge. In consultation with the Departmental Assessment Committee, the instructor of the course in which this fundamental knowledge was to be conveyed planned to increase the depth and time spent on the relevant content and skills, and the department planned to add discussion of this material in another required course and to reassess this learning outcome the following year.

II. Psychology

The Department of Psychology assessed oral communication skills with the goal of seventy-five percent (75%) of students attaining an "acceptable" or higher level on a rubric-scored oral presentation of a research-based topic in two core psychology classes. Students in one course surpassed the goal with one hundred percent (100%) of students attaining a level of "acceptable" or higher; however, only fifty percent (50%) of students in the fall section of the second course attained a level of "acceptable" while ninety-two percent (92%) of students in the spring section attained a level of "acceptable" or higher. Analysis of the assessment data revealed that students in both semesters who failed to attain an "acceptable" rating tended to fail to include an adequate discussion of how their finding related to previous research or failed to present an introduction that logically led to the hypothesis. In response, the department modified this course to include additional attention to instructing students on coherence in the introduction and discussion by providing models of good and poor introductions and discussions.

The transition from the SMART assessment process to the current Academic Program Review precluded collection of 2007-2008 assessment reports. For a further discussion of this transition see <u>assessment process revision</u>. However, the shift in focus from assessing nine of the *Characteristics of the Murray State*

Referral Report Page | 12

Graduate to only one—the degree to which students have mastered their chosen field of study—encouraged programs and departments to consider the results and procedures of previous assessment cycles in both pedagogical and curriculum decisions. Also, the university-wide nature of the intensive revision of assessment procedures supported the departments in this endeavor, as well as in designing their new assessment plans.

Referral Report Page | 13

Federal Requirement 4.5 Student Complaints

The institution has adequate procedures for addressing written student complaints and is responsible for demonstrating that it follows those procedures when resolving student complaints.

Referral Citation:

"The institution did not provide sufficient information to clearly demonstrate that the institution follows its procedures when resolving student complaints. The report did not include original source documentation demonstrating response to student complaints. Samples of written student complaints with student names redacted and related documentation illustrating process toward resolution would have been helpful. Document that the institution follows its published procedures in resolving student complaints."

Response to Judgment of Compliance

In compliance

Narrative of Compliance:

In its Fifth-Year Interim Report, <u>Murray State University</u> (MSU) provided information about the assessment of student complaints (FR 4.5). In response, reviewers noted:

The institution did not provide sufficient information to clearly demonstrate that the institution follows its procedures when resolving student complaints. The report did not include original source documentation demonstrating response to student complaints.

Accordingly, reviewers stated that, "[s]amples of written student complaints with student names redacted and related documentation illustrating process toward resolution would have been helpful. Document that the institution follows its published procedures in resolving student complaints."

Provision of Samples of Student Complaints and Related Documentation

The following examples are provided to demonstrate that published procedures are followed when responding to student complaints. The types of complaints portrayed are limited to those for which detailed procedures are required by university policy, rather than examples of responses to simple student complaints (e.g., grade appeals rather than complaints about dorm roommates or parking tickets).

I. Grade Appeal

When a student wishes to appeal a grade, several steps are followed, as specified in the <u>Graduate</u> and <u>Undergraduate Bulletins</u>.

Example 1 (Graduate Student; Appeal Denied):

After failing to receive a satisfactory response after speaking to the instructor (Step 1) the graduate student brought his complaint to the chair of the department in which the class was taught. The student was enrolled in a program in another college within MSU; therefore, he met with the chair of the department in which the class was taught to obtain the information required in Step 2. The department chair then conducted her own assessment of the student's work (Step 3) and then had the work evaluated again by two others (one faculty member inside the department and one from another college within the university), a step not required by university policy but employed to ensure objectivity. The chair and the two faculty members agreed that the failing grades were deserved. The student then took his complaint to the dean (Step 4), who agreed with the prior assessments that the assignments deserved failing grades. The student then took his appeal to the Registrar (Step 5), who forwarded the complaint to the chair of the Appeals Board (Step 6). The Appeals Board then reviewed the case, made a determination, and then forwarded its recommendation to the Provost (Step 7). The Provost then made the determination based on information provided in the appeal and on recommendations from the Appeals Board (Step 8). A letter with the Provost's decision to deny the appeal was sent to the student.

Example 2 (Undergraduate Student; Appeal Supported):

The student first met with his instructor to appeal the fact that he earned a failing grade for the course despite having permission to audit the class (Step 1). After being told by the professor that she would not change his grade from "E" to "Audit," the student attempted to meet with the department chair, who was out of town and would not return until the following week (Step 2). So that the process would not be held up by the chair's absence, the dean met with the student (Step 3) and then forwarded the student appeal to the Registrar (Step 4). The appeal was then sent to the Appeals Board (Step 5) and a hearing was convened (Step 6). In this case, the Appeals Board recommended to the Provost that the student's grade of "Audit" be reinstated, thus removing the "E" from his transcript (Step 7). The Provost then sent a memo to the student stating that his Audit grade had been reinstated.

II. Residency Appeal

When a student wishes to appeal a residency determination, steps outlined on the MSU Registrar's Office web page are followed.

Example 1 (Appeal Withdrawn):

The student applied for Kentucky state residency status and was denied. The student then wrote a letter to the Registrar declaring his intent to appeal this decision, which resulted in a meeting of the Residency Review Committee to review the appeal. The Residency Review Committee denied the student's appeal, and the student requested a Formal Institutional Hearing. The Provost's Office then sent a letter to the student informing him of the date of the hearing. The student was also given a link to information that would be helpful to him as he prepared his case, as well as a three-page document outlining the hearing procedures. The student requested a meeting with the Provost to discuss the hearing. Following the meeting with the Provost, the student decided to withdraw his appeal and cancelled the scheduled hearing.

Example 2 (Appeal Supported):

The student <u>stated in writing</u> that she wished to appeal this decision. The student <u>stated in writing</u> that she wished to appeal this decision. The student then submitted documentation to support her residency status. The Residency Review Committee was then convened. Based on information from the student's residency affidavit and additional information provided by her, the Residency Review Committee supported her appeal and <u>notified her in writing</u> of its decision.

III. Time Extension Appeal

When graduate students have not completed their advanced degrees within an eight-year time period, they can appeal to have this time limit extended as specified in the Graduate Bulletin. Graduate students request a time extension through their advisor and their program graduate coordinator. A letter of request and supporting documents are then submitted by the student's advisor to the Graduate Studies Committee of the Academic Council. Time extensions are then considered by the Graduate Studies Committee on a case-by-case basis.

Examples 1 and 2 (Appeals Supported):

In both cases, the students first sought support from their faculty advisors. The advisor and/or the graduate coordinator then presented the <u>student's written appeal</u> to the Graduate Studies Committee and answered in person any questions that the committee had about the student and the student's ability to complete the degree within the requested time frame. The Graduate Studies Committee then voted in both cases to <u>approve the time extension</u>. <u>Letters</u> were then sent to the students from Graduate Admissions informing them of the outcome of their appeals.

IV. Student Complaints to the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO)

Example 1 (No Official Complaint Filed):

The following example illustrates how Public Safety and Emergency Management, the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO), and the Division of Student Affairs have coordinated efforts to resolve student concerns.

A student filed a complaint with Public Safety. Public Safety notified the Division of Student Affairs (DSA). When the student mentioned sexual harassment during the description of the incident, Public Safety stopped the interview and called the OEO. In an effort to limit the re-telling of the incident, a combined meeting, involving representatives from all three offices, was arranged at Public Safety for the same day. The plan for resolution involved Public Safety interviewing the parties and sending the information to the prosecutor for review. Once that process was complete, the OEO would proceed with the sexual harassment complaint, and then the DSA would address concerns that fall outside of those areas. In the meantime, the OEO took steps to separate the parties in question. Public Safety decided there was not sufficient evidence to prosecute a criminal case. The student met with the OEO to discuss sexual harassment and the process for filing a complaint (See: How do you report sexual harassment). No official complaint was filed. The OEO met with the involved parties and then again with the student. Given the safety measure previously imposed, the student no longer felt the need to pursue an official complaint.

Example 2 (Complaint of Discrimination):

When members of the MSU community believe that they have been adversely affected by a discriminatory event, they may go to the Office of Equal Opportunity to file a complaint of discrimination. When this occurs, the MSU Grievance Procedures are followed. The following example illustrates a case in which a student took a complaint of racial discrimination to the OEO.

In this case, a student believed she was discriminated against by her employer due to her race. After being fired, the student filed a written complaint to the Office of Equal Opportunity (Step1A). The OEO then mailed a memorandum and a copy of the student's complaint to the Charged Party notifying the individual of the complaint (Step 1B). The Charged Party then submitted a written response to the charge (Step 1C1). The OEO then sent a letter and a copy of the Charged Party's written response to the student (Step 1C2). The letter asked the student to "let us know how you would like to proceed." At this time, copies of the documents from Steps 1A, 1B, 1C1, and 1C2 were given to the MSU General Counsel (Step 1D). A meeting was then held with the student (Step 1E), followed by a separate meeting with the Charged Party (Step 1F). At this point it was determined that the Director of OEO did not need to conduct a formal

investigation and that an informal resolution could proceed (Step 1G). On June 2, 2009, a meeting with the Director of OEO, the student, the Charged Party, and the MSU Compliance Coordinator was held (Step 1H). The notarized summary of this meeting indicates that the complaint was resolved informally and that no further action would be taken by the OEO.

QEP Impact Report

Evaluation of the QEP Impact Report

"The Committee also reviewed the institution's QEP Impact Report and found it to be unacceptable. The institution is requested to submit an additional report, due April 15, 2011, demonstrating the extent to which the QEP has affected outcomes related to student learning. The following are direct comments from the readers:

Although Murray State began implementation of the approved QEP, revisions were made to make implementation more manageable and develop "specific performance indicators, evaluation procedures and outcomes assessment" which were not present in the approved plan. In 2009, a new QEP Steering Committee was established, and a new process was implemented, to select a new topic, focusing on writing. Provide documentation of the process used to generate the new topic and describe the activities implemented and assessments conducted."

Response to Judgment of Compliance

In compliance

Narrative of Compliance:

In response to SACS' request for "an additional report . . . demonstrating the extent to which the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) has affected outcomes related to student learning," and to "provide documentation of the process used to generate the new topic [along with a description of] the activities implemented and assessments conducted," <u>Murray State University</u> (MSU) respectfully submits the following report.

MSU submitted its last ten-year report to SACS in 2004, very shortly after SACS introduced the Quality Enhancement Plan as part of its new and innovative educational initiative. Thus, MSU was part of the very first cohort required to both comprehend this new standard and to determine how best to satisfy it. The QEP was a challenge not only to the colleges and universities asked to develop and include one, but for SACS as well. In the early stages of SACS' explanation of this new requirement, the QEP seemed both significant and over-arching; thus, the initiating institutions struggled with the question of magnitude and effectiveness. MSU may have erred on the side of magnitude, as the initial QEP submitted to SACS was clearly far too ambitious and, thus, ungainly for both assessment purposes and learning effectiveness. Indeed, members of the 2004 SACS Review Team commented on precisely these concerns when they observed that MSU's QEP was "very ambitious," and suggested that our focus be narrowed to make implementation more "manageable."

The Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs took these concerns seriously, prompting the QEP Steering Committee to re-examine and consider the range and effectiveness of the QEP MSU had submitted to SACS in 2004. The revised QEP included in the university's fifth-year report, with its focus on the enhancement of students' writing skills, emerged out of a continuous review process related directly to the institution's internal reaffirmation, and represents a narrowing of our QEP focus, not a radical break from the original idea.

Our continuous review process began as early as 1991 when MSU established an ongoing emphasis on several desired characteristics to be acquired by a MSU graduate. The original list of characteristics approved by the Board of Regents in 1993 included eight (8), with the first focusing on students' ability to "express [their] thought(s) effectively in oral and written communication" (quoted in the *MSU University Bulletin*, 1991-1993). Ten years later, in 2003, the university expanded the eight characteristics to include two more, thus raising the number of *Characteristics* to ten (10). Even with this revision, the first characteristic on the list remained an emphasis on students' ability to express thoughts "effectively in oral and written communication." Much like the original eight characteristics that were identified in a broad-based institutional process, this new list of ten characteristics was approved by numerous deliberative bodies at MSU, including the university's Faculty Senate, the University Academic Council, and the Board of Regents. Faculty, staff, and students were involved in the university's development of a new strategic initiative.

Indeed, the collaborative process that included all of the major campus constituencies at the university reaffirmed MSU's long-standing commitment to the enhancement of student writing skills, an objective that has been at the forefront of our undergraduate curriculum for at least the past two decades. In fact, when the original QEP Committee was established in 2003-2004, the first goal considered by that committee was to focus on writing. Upon further reflection and consideration, however, several members of the committee were concerned that such a focus would be too narrowly construed and, thus not satisfy what SACS was looking for in a QEP. Ironically, the committee may have overcompensated as they moved to focus our QEP on nine of the ten characteristics, and to do so on a rotating schedule focusing on one each year over the ten years of the SACS accreditation.

The original QEP submitted as part of Murray State's 2004 Institutional Summary was called, appropriately, "Enhancing the *Characteristics of the MSU Graduate*." The decision to pursue what was, admittedly, an ambitious and broadbased focus emerged out of a multi-tiered, university-wide strategic planning process that occurred during the 2001-2002 academic year. In this iteration of the plan, representatives from across the university again participated in the decision-making process.

The initial QEP proposed to "enhance the ability of MSU to sustain and improve the quality of academic programs and make more explicit the contributions of academic support areas, such as the University Libraries, the Institute for International Studies, the Honors Program, and the Undergraduate

Research and Scholarly Activities Office, to the accomplishment of the *Characteristics of the Murray State Graduate*." Toward that end, "all QEP subplans [would] enhance the ability of the institution to intentionally address, emphasize, deliver, and assess the acquisition of the *Characteristics of the Murray State Graduate* through the related functions of teaching and learning."

Over the next five years, the university enhanced the visibility of one characteristic each year and made great strides in seeing that all academic units incorporated some aspect of the characteristic into their annual curriculum activities. For example, during the first year of the plan, 2005–2006, the university focused on Characteristic #7: "Understand the importance of and engage in ethical behavior and responsible citizenship." Departments submitted detailed plans that focused on four key elements of student learning: Student Understanding of Ethical Behavior, Student Engagement of Ethical Behavior, Student Understanding of Responsible Citizenship, and Student Engagement in Responsible Citizenship. Department plans described the ways in which courses introduced students to ethical behavior and responsible citizenship; but, very few units collected data measuring the effectiveness of these plans. The Department of Music, for example, identified the ways in which private music lessons modeled respect and honesty, and fostered a climate of civility. The Senior Seminar in Music allowed students to discuss ethical concerns, and music education students were encouraged to participate in K-12 service activities. Journalism and Mass Communication students learned respect for and tolerance of the free exchange of ideas in several courses, while honesty and respect for others was discussed specifically in JMC 426 (Advertising Media Sales), and ethics in the workplace was a major component of JMC 391 (Public Relations Principles). The Department of Management and Marketing provided several aspects of ethical behavior and responsible citizenship taught by specific professors. These examples indicate the breadth of curriculum efforts at MSU to teach ethical behavior and responsible citizenship. What was lacking, however, was the collection of assessment data indicating exactly what students learned about either of these important qualities/characteristics.

Building on the work done in 2005-2006 on *Characteristic 7*, departments were required the following academic year (2006-2007) to map three (*Characteristics 1, 6 and 7*) of the ten characteristics to the core courses required in each major (*Curriculum Mapping*). These three characteristics were selected to build upon the previous year's focus on *Characteristic 7*, to explore more fully the current academic year's work on *Characteristic 6*, and to prepare for the following year's emphasis on *Characteristic 1*.

The curriculum mapping project divided these three characteristics into seven distinct topics for two reasons: first, to identify particular subjects in which learning outcomes could be assessed and, second, to help ease chairs and departments into the university's assessment effort to focus, over the course of several years, on nine of the ten characteristics. *Characteristic 9* was not included as it focuses on the discipline in which a student majors.

Characteristic 1, for example, with its focus on oral and written communication, was subdivided into the two distinct topics of "written

communication" and "oral communication." Characteristic 6, "understand the dynamics of cultural diversity, of competing economic and political systems, and of complex moral and ethical issues," was subdivided into three separate topics to be assessed: Ethical Behavior, Cultural Diversity, and Diverse Economic and Political Systems. And, finally, Characteristic 7, "understand the importance of and engage in ethical behavior and responsible citizenship," was subdivided into Moral and Ethical Issues and Responsible Citizenship. As part of this curriculum mapping, departments indicated the level of engagement acquired in each course with a code of I, A, or E: I meaning "Introduces" (the professor discusses or demonstrates the learning outcome, students observe or listen, discuss or repeat the information learned about the *Characteristic*); A meaning "Applies" (student is asked to interpret, order, infer, predict, summarize, apply, or illustrate information learned related to the *Characteristic*); and E meaning "Evaluates" (student creates a graded paper, project, display, or is tested to determine the degree of knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis related to the Characteristic). Every department submitted a table with these ratings applied to all required courses. Although each department assessed its discipline-specific objectives, none of the departments conducted assessments based on the QEP mapping of the curricula described above. It was at this point that the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs became concerned that the plan was not working and that trying to assess a different characteristic each year was neither effective nor possible.

Efforts over the first five years of trying to implement this large-scale plan confirmed the previously mentioned concern raised by the SACS review team that MSU's QEP was "very ambitious" and, thus, probably not "manageable." As early as 2008, the ability to assess student learning outcomes was hindered greatly by the breadth of the original plan. While the focus on individual characteristics related our original QEP to specific learning outcomes, those outcomes were not measurable in a concrete, quantitative way, nor could they be measured reliably or validly across disciplines and the university. Indeed, a significant problem emerged almost immediately: a plan that emphasizes one characteristic for one year and then moves on to another characteristic the following year, on an annual cycle, does not allow for the kind of follow-through or protracted focus that learning requires. Limiting the scope of assessment of student learning undermined the original plan and pointed to how unwieldy that plan was.

At about the same time that this conclusion was emerging on a local, university level, then-Associate provost Dr. Higginson attended a SACS assessment conference in the spring of 2008. Panels she attended on assessing an institution's QEP confirmed the Provost's concern about MSU's ability to effectively assess such a wide-ranging QEP as our own. Simultaneously, two fairly major curriculum initiatives and reviews were occurring at MSU (reduction of majors to 120 credits where possible and review and revision of the University Studies program) that accompanied our struggle to make the QEP more effective. In this broad context, a newly constituted committee to review the QEP was appointed by the Provost.

Central to our deliberations about the QEP was the Provost's decision in 2005 to convene a Blue Ribbon Commission to review and revise the University Studies program (general education curriculum). The heart of this review, as determined by a thirty-two (32) member, broad-based university-wide committee, focused once again on the *Characteristics of the Murray State Graduate*. The commission was charged with considering ways to enhance the overall undergraduate educational experience with reference to *MSU's Mission, Values, Vision, and Characteristics Statement*. The commission was also charged to consider a number of academic factors as part of the revision process: program design, course sequencing, course requirements, and new course recommendations. Sub-committees were assigned the tasks of investigating benchmark institutions and national general education trends, state-wide transfer and articulation agreements, and student preparation in grades K-12.

In addition to the research done on external areas of concern, the commission also assessed faculty ideas about changes to strengthen the University Studies program. Toward those ends, the commission developed and administered a survey of the faculty in order to obtain clear parameters for the revision. The extensive research conducted by sub-committees, coupled with the results of the <u>faculty survey</u>, produced a set of goals: to maintain the current number of credits in general education; to incorporate the Characteristics of the Murray State Graduate as identified by the university; to increase emphasis on writing skills, mathematics, ethics, and civics; to include wellness as part of the program; and to ensure flexibility, within certain parameters, for students. Based on these outcomes, the commission adopted a thematic approach to reorganizing the new University Studies Program, one that would be organized around the ten Characteristics of the Murray State Graduate. This approach would serve two purposes: to continue to position the *Characteristics* at the heart of undergraduate education and to free the University Studies Program from disciplinary ownership and resultant turf wars. The commission identified six broad themes under which courses would be organized: Oral and Written Communication; Scientific Inquiry; Methodologies and Quantitative Skills; World's Historical, Literary, and Philosophical Traditions; Social and Self-Awareness and Responsible Citizenship; and University Studies Approved Electives. To emphasize the importance of enhancing student writing skills, the commission decided to add one more required writing course beyond the two semesters of composition previously required and did so by requiring that each major identify a writingintensive course as part of its degree requirements.

While finalizing the new University Studies program was a major step forward in the University's pursuit of a QEP, the faculty had become concerned about yearly assessment of the *Characteristics*. Although, they agreed that the topics were worthy and interesting, a year was not enough time to develop a program and measure the effects of a given *Characteristic*. The faculty and administration agreed that the original QEP should be revised.

To begin the process, the Provost asked two faculty members to co-chair a newly established <u>QEP Steering Committee</u>. One co-chair was the director of the University Studies Program and was selected to facilitate the connection between

the QEP topic and the University Studies Program's assessment plan; the other was the assistant dean of the College of Education, an expert in student outcomes assessment. To become better prepared for these new responsibilities, the cochairs and the then-Associate provost for Academic Programs attended the 2008 SACS conference in San Antonio, Texas. One of the recurrent themes emphasized in all of the panels attended was the necessity to narrow an institution's QEP, not broaden it, so as to prevent it from becoming unmanageable. SACS-accredited institutions, especially those in the first cohort required to implement a QEP as part of their accreditation, stressed the necessity to identify one or two student learning enhancement goals. Most of the plans, it seemed, focused on one or two of the same objectives: writing skills or critical thinking. While some institutional plans looked to enhance global awareness or cultural sensitivity, representatives from those schools admitted to the difficulty of assessing student learning outcomes.

Another dimension of the QEP stressed by both SACS and institutions deep in the thralls of developing a QEP was the necessity to demonstrate university-wide involvement and buy-in. Thus, the new steering committee at MSU was comprised intentionally of representatives from the five academic colleges, the School of Agriculture, the University Libraries, and the Dean of Continuing Education; along with representatives from Student Affairs, Regional Stewardship, Student Government, the Board of Regents, and the President's Office. The committee met for the first time in February 2009 to discuss strategies for selecting a topic and to generate campus-wide interest in the QEP.

Those attending the 2008 SACS Annual Meeting also relied on what was learned to help determine the list of student learning outcomes MSU might wish to emphasize. Thus, the original list considered by the new QEP Steering Committee included the *Characteristics of the Murray State Graduate*, the Thematic Categories of the University Studies Program, and topics being focused on at our sister institutions that had already developed plans. After extensive discussion, the committee selected five topics for consideration: critical thinking, information literacy, cultural diversity, written communication, and community engagement. A <u>survey</u> was developed and, in spring 2009, an electronic version was sent to stakeholders across the campus (faculty, staff, students, alumni, and administrators) asking them to rank the topics based on interest and need. The return rate for faculty was sixty-nine percent (69%), indicating a high level of engagement.

The results of the survey positioned two topics ahead of the others: writing skills and critical thinking. With this faculty endorsement in mind, the co-chairs were charged with researching best practices for teaching and assessing each topic. In fall 2009, the Steering Committee meeting began with a report and recommendation for the selection of one of the topics. The QEP Steering Committee accepted the recommendation of the co-chairs to focus assessment and enhancement of student learning on improvement of writing skills. Once the topic had been identified, the Steering Committee turned its attention to how best to build on the university-wide awareness of the QEP in general and support for the topic of writing skills in particular.

To initiate campus-wide involvement, a press release was written describing how the QEP had evolved, how the new topic was selected, and how the plan would be implemented. This was shared first with the academic deans, who met with the co-chairs and the associate provost to discuss strategies for dissemination. The next step in the process was to meet with departmental chairs in order to disseminate information to the faculty. The co-chairs then met with the Faculty Senate; after that, information was distributed more generally across the campus. At the center of this strategy was the request to each constituency for ideas about how best to proceed with the QEP to improve writing skills.

Since submitting our Fifth Year Report last March (2009), MSU has made several significant steps toward realizing its newly focused QEP. The provost appointed a Director of the Quality Enhancement Plan, who is charged with coordinating efforts to enhance the teaching of writing across the university and at all levels of a student's education. The QEP Director established a University Writing Advisory Board that is charged with identifying, communicating, and coordinating over-arching, university-wide approaches to enhance students' writing abilities. The provost also established a coordinator of the newly created Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Program (WAC) to coordinate the teaching of writing efforts in each academic college and school, and to provide faculty development in support of writing pedagogy. As part of the WAC initiative, Writing Ambassadors have been identified from each of the colleges/schools; the Ambassadors' responsibilities include the development of writing assessment plans for the disciplines in their academic areas. The university also created the Racer Writing Center, housed in the main library, and has appointed a director to train graduate student mentors and to develop wide-ranging approaches to assisting students with developing their writing skills. In addition, the Department of English and Philosophy and the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT), with the support of the provost, instituted a Holistic Scoring Team comprised of eight trained raters that spent a full year training to a high level of inter-rater reliability (.91) on a 6-point anchored rubric assessing writing. Using this normed rubric, the holistic scoring team has successfully assessed writing regardless of discipline, assignment, and student level.

Since MSU narrowed the focus of the QEP to the enhancement of students' writing skills, a significant amount of data has been collected, confirming our decision to focus attention on strengthening students' ability to write well. These new assessments and results are timely (i.e., immediate) and provide baseline information for a university-wide assessment protocol that examines one trait longitudinally. These results will be much more valuable than the previous approach as the institution continues to focus its QEP on writing.

The assessment of the impact of the QEP initiative (student writing) has three components. First, the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) of Writing Skills will be administered yearly to exiting seniors, with an initial freshman baseline collected in fall 2010 for comparison. The CAAP is a standardized, nationally-normed assessment program offered and scored by ACT. The CAAP Writing Essay Test assesses student performance on two, twenty (20)-minute writing tasks that prompt students to take and defend a position in

response to a hypothetical situation and defined audience. Two trained raters use a six-point, modified holistic scoring system to evaluate students' writing skills. Second, writing in required courses (ENG 105, HUM 211, and CIV 201/202) will be assessed yearly. Third, student writing in writing-intensive courses for each major will be assessed on a rotating four-year schedule (writing-intensive assessment schedule). To conduct this assessment, each college/school may select one of two options: devise an internal method conducted by the experts among their faculty and staff or engage MSU's Holistic Scoring Team, a group of scorers who have trained on a normed rubric that assesses writing for relative levels of mastery across six key dimensions, regardless of course, assignment, or content.

CAAP Writing Essay assessment

In fall 2010, the <u>CAAP Writing Essay test</u> was administered to one hundred eighty-two (182) first-year students. On average, MSU first-year students' writing scored a 3.0 on the normed 6-point holistic scale with a standard deviation of 0.6 in those scores. MSU's first-year students' average score is close to the national average of 3.2. Because of MSU's commitment to enhancing student writing skills, the university considers this average score of 3.0 as a baseline and intends to monitor the impact of pedagogical improvements by assessing seniors, with the goal of achieving higher scores in successive years as the result of improvements in writing pedagogy.

Writing in Required Courses

In 2010, students' writing in the required, core curriculum courses (ENG 105, HUM 211, and CIV 201/202) was assessed. The MSU Holistic Scoring Team assessed student writing in the first-year composition course, ENG 105, and the humanities course, HUM 211. ENG 105 students scored, on average, 3.067 and HUM 211 students scored, on average, 3.374 on the 6-point holistic scale. These scores indicate that these first- and second-year students' writing shows some mastery of, but not control over, skills such as making major aims clear, being aware of audience, using appropriate voice, developing ideas, organizing material, and controlling mechanics and grammar. When average scores for ENG 105 and HUM 211 were compared, students in the humanities class wrote significantly better than composition students. This significant difference suggests that students are building on the skills acquired in their composition courses in one of the next required courses in the writing sequence. MSU's dedication to ensuring student improvement in writing across the university experience prompted an addition to the assessment protocol for future years: a sample of CIV 201/202 writing assessed by the Holistic Scoring Team to allow for the comparison across the first-year composition class (ENG 105) and the two sophomore-level general education courses (HUM 211 and CIV 201/202). CIV 201/202 courses will continue to be assessed by their department experts, using their rubric, to guarantee long-range comparisons among the criteria of interest.

A three-person scoring team assessed fifty-eight (58) common final essays from fall CIV 201 and 202 classes using the CIV Writing Assessment Rubric, which evaluates students' mastery of purpose, organization, and presentation (see <u>CIV writing assessment report FA 2010</u>). Purpose, organization, and presentation were evaluated on a four-point scale, ranging from 4 (excellent) to 1 (poor), and

scores from each of the three assessors were averaged to produce an overall average for these three writing objectives. Writing from CIV students in fall 2010 classes scored a 2.36 on a 4-point scale for purpose, a 2.70 on a 4-point scale for organization, and a 2.97 on a 4-point scale for presentation. These results suggest that CIV student writing indicates a fair to good demonstration of organization and grammar. CIV faculty plan to address the relative weakness of scores for purpose by focusing on methods to improve students' ability to compose clear and precise thesis statements.

Writing-Intensive Course Assessment

Also in fall 2010, thirteen (13) writing-intensive courses were scheduled for assessment of student writing. Three colleges (the College of Business; the College of Science, Engineering, and Technology; and the College of Health Sciences and Human Services) used the discipline experts in their fields to objectively assess student writing using the fields' best practices. Assessment reports that provided a description of the assessment procedure, criteria, quantitative results, and plans for using those data were submitted to the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, with compliance from all targeted programs (see QEP Fall 2010 assessment reports). Assessments in BPA 215, Business Communication, GSC 301, Understanding Scientific Communication, and CHE 305, Analytical Chemistry, used independent reviewers and rubrics to assess writing across multiple dimensions, such as, but not limited to, audience and purpose, organization and format, and grammar and mechanics. Assessment in OSH 287, Standards for General Industry and Construction, analyzed the improvement of student scores in three main areas (accuracy, clarity, and precision) and one minor area, professionalism, on two written assignments. Assessment in JMC 336, Script Writing, also analyzed the improvement of student scores across the semester in four areas (spelling, grammar, editing, and form/style), using an early assignment and a late assignment, matched by student and assignment length. Programs identified relative strengths and weaknesses and outlined plans to use assessment results for curricular and programmatic improvement.

For example, the Department of Geosciences assessed its writing-intensive course, GSC 301, Understanding Scientific Communication, using a rubric evaluating eight writing components, including content, process, and presentation. Raters assessed ten- to fifteen-page journal articles written by all seventeen (17) students enrolled in the class, assigning holistic scores falling into four categories: excellent, good, fair, and poor. Fifteen (15) of the seventeen (17) students' articles received scores at fair and above, thus meeting or exceeding the minimum expectations for undergraduate scientific papers; ten students were scored at the good or excellent levels. The raters noted that three areas needed specific attention: writing from an outline, scientific abstracting, and preparation of charts and tables. Furthermore, papers signifying poorer performance failed to adhere to guidelines, demonstrated deficiencies in the organization or structure of the paper, and seemed to lack an understanding of how to present and organize the paper. Accordingly, the department has decided to include anonymous peer review of

drafts of the papers, as well as a draft submission for faculty feedback, in this course in the future.

Two colleges (the College of Education and the College of Humanities and Fine Arts) used the Holistic Scoring Team to assess student writing. A normed, reliable holistic scoring team (blind to student, instructor, course, and assignment information) objectively assessed sixty-five (65) teaching philosophy statements from the College of Education and written assignments from four courses in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, using a validated criterion-anchored rubric. The inter-rater reliability of the holistic scoring team was 0.92, which exceeds the standards for best practices and indicates high confidence that the results are reliable. The assessment results will be discussed by faculty, programs, and departments and will be used to inform decisions for curricular and programmatic improvement.

For example, ten documented research papers written in ENG 321, Research in Literary Studies, were assessed. On average, ENG 321 students' writing scored a 4.25 on a 6-point scale with a standard deviation of 0.7905. The low standard deviation suggests that while there is some variation in mastery across the samples, these documented research papers are relatively consistent in their mastery of elements of writing. In general, the writing of ENG 321 students can be described as consistently making major aims clear and demonstrating disciplinary conventions; reflecting consistent awareness of audience; establishing an appropriate voice for the audience and purpose; developing and consistently representing an idea, experience, or text; selecting and arranging material to establish a clear focus and provide essential transitions; and consistently controlling surface-level features of written language. The Department of English and Philosophy plans to discuss these results more thoroughly at a spring departmental meeting and to use the results to inform programmatic and course curriculum changes. In the meantime, the department plans to continue to assess ENG 321 in 2011, and in subsequent years, to compare the scores in ENG 321 to English undergraduate writing scores.

In sum, MSU was one of the first institutions to develop a QEP. During implementation of the original plan, the institution found that with the inability to follow up on annual goals, with a different goal selected each year, departments could not do anything more than provide an annual snapshot of student activity rather than assessing progress on these goals. At the 2008 SACS Assessment Conference, Dr. Bonnie Higginson, the associate provost for academic programs, gained valuable information that solidified our recognition that our QEP was unworkable. Through surveys of all university constituencies, it was determined that MSU should narrow its focus to one aspect of the first Characteristic of the Murray State Graduate: to improve student writing abilities. This outcome was part of the original QEP now narrowed to a feasible focus. Accordingly, the improvement of student writing is being assessed by a three-pronged approach: the administration of the national standardized CAAP Essay Writing subtest, yearly assessment of required University Studies courses (ENG 105, HUM 211, CIV 201/202), and a rotating four-year assessment plan for writing-intensive courses.