

Campus Assessment Report 2005-2006

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In 2003, the Fond du Lac campus developed a very detailed, complex strategic plan. The campus benefited from the very activity of drawing up the plan in that the extensive planning sessions allowed faculty and staff to conduct discussions with regard to the goals, needs, and shortcomings of the campus. Still, previous efforts to document which of the recommendations found with the strategic plan have actually been implemented fell short. While committee chairs were asked to report any appropriate activities to a strategic plan coordinator, reporting was inconsistent nor were committees always the focus of proposed actions within the plan. Thus, the first goal in assessing the effectiveness of the strategic plan was to gather better data as to which of the proposed activities (“key strategies”) within the plan had actually been implemented. A longer range goal was to use the information as guidance in formulating a new strategic plan (feed any information gained back into the loop).

Having set out to assess the effectiveness of the strategic plan, a key meeting was held during registration week prior to the Spring semester. The Steering Committee set aside a three hour block for the Campus Assessment Coordinator and a faculty member who was instrumental in formulating the original plan (Mike Jurmu) to discuss the status of the strategic plan with the entire faculty and staff (that includes both administrative and support staff). The meeting was very fruitful. As a result of the discussion, the following decisions were made:

1. Rather than formulating a new strategic plan every four to five years, the body overwhelming supported the idea of having a “rolling strategic plan.” In other words, the campus would look at the strategic plan and make adjustments within the plan on a yearly or biannual basis. The opinion of the body was that more closely spaced, periodic review of the strategic plan would help keep it a living document actually used to guide campus activities.
2. In addition to having annual or biannual revisions to the plan, there would be periodic, but less frequent “visionary sessions.” The point of these sessions would be to think in terms of long range educational goals in light of new academic trends.
3. In order to improve upon the reporting of which parts of recommended actions within the current strategic plan had been carried out, a suggestion was made to set up a “blog” or some other sort of internet site and then encourage people to enter any accomplishments that they were aware of. No decision was made at the January meeting as how to best encourage people to actually report on this site. Suggestions ranged from asking faculty to report when they fill out their annual Faculty Activity Reports to having people report at the end of the school year.

In light of the above meeting, the IT staff was consulted with regard to what would be the best sort of Internet devise that would allow for reporting of activities meeting the recommendations of the strategic plan. They designed an Intranet site (only available to members of the campus community). The strategic plan itself had four main focus areas, each with two to six “strategic action goals.” Each of the strategic action goals, in turn, had three to six “key strategies.” The trick was to set up a system that would allow participants to navigate through these categories and subcategories to an appropriate “key strategy” and list whether the strategy had actually been addressed.

In the end, the IT staff designed a site in which all of the strategic action goals (grouped into the four main focus areas) were given separate listings. Each goal then had a drop down menu listing the “key strategies” found under that goal. Members of the campus community could then post a message (or a reply) to any of these “key strategy” listings.

The next step was to have the Steering Committee view the Intranet site and “test drive” it. They did so and found it to their liking. The site was then presented at a Collegium meeting. Since that time, people have been encouraged to fill out entries into the site. In addition, a two and a half hour meeting of the “Dean’s Cabinet” was devoted to having members of the cabinet, divided into working groups fill in entries into the site. (The Dean’s Cabinet was chosen partly because it had representatives from all portions of the campus community including the support staff and partly because it was a particularly knowledgeable group about activities on the campus.)

The campus now has a listing of activities that have taken place that meet the “key strategies” found in the 2003 strategic plan. (A rough estimate is that these reports are about eighty to eighty five percent complete.) Members who helped generate the reports feel that they are in a better position to make recommendations on what needs to remain in the strategic plan, what can be dropped in what was originally proposed has been accomplished, and what should never have been in the plan in the first place. The current Steering Committee has recommended that planning on the rolling strategic plan begin with the opening meeting prior to the fall semester.

Assessment of the ESFY program was left in the hands of the ESFY coordinator (Richard Gustin).

In the area of teaching, two ongoing activities deserve mention. Faculty members are regularly encouraged to conduct individualized, midterm assessments. “Midterm” is a bit of a misnomer in that these activities can occur any time within the semester. (One faculty member, for example, polled his students about class activities after one week of classes.) The point of these exercises is to allow teachers to gain feedback from students early enough in the semester to allow for changes to be made with regard to teaching practices prior to semester’s end. Some teachers sought information from students on how they study for exams and what class materials they find most useful. Others were concerned about particular class activities and whether students find them effective.

Finally, this year a faculty member initiated a series of monthly meetings to discuss Kenneth Bain’s book *What the Best College Teachers Do*. At the halfway mark of the academic year, the organizer sent out a survey to participants with regard to whether the sessions were useful, and, if they resulted in any actual changes in the teacher’s planning for the second semester. Of the ten or twelve active participants from the first semester, almost all reported that they had either made changes in their syllabus or had planned new activities for the second semester because of the meetings of the discussion group. Based upon this assessment, the faculty member continued the sessions for the rest of the year and is planning a similar discussion group for the next year.