To better manage the administrative activities within her school, Shirley Williams, dean of Gonzaga University’s School of Education, uses a technique called RACI charting, which helps clarify faculty roles and workloads and ensures that all essential administrative tasks are accomplished.

RACI charting, which stands for Responsibility, Accountability, Consultation, and Information, is a technique Williams adapted from the corporate world, where it is often used to manage corporate reorganizations.

A RACI chart is a grid that lists the administrative responsibilities in the left-hand column (these should be detailed descriptions of each responsibility), while the various positions are listed along the top (dean, dean’s assistant, department chair, program director, etc.).

For each responsibility, the person who is responsible for that activity should have an “R” in his or her column that corresponds with that responsibility. An “A” should go in the column of the person to whom the individual is accountable. A “C” should go in the columns of the people who should be consulted on this responsibility. And an “I” should go in the columns of the people who should be informed about progress related to that responsibility.

Because the RACI chart is only as good at the information that goes into it, Williams recommends starting by brainstorming to come up with a detailed list of all of the responsibilities within the unit and then within each position. Begin by listing things that people in the unit do on a day-to-day basis and decide which of those activities are essential and who should be responsible for each.

“It became clear that even within the School of Education there was a wide variety of expectations that program directors or department chairs had, depending on the nature of the discipline. We got down to a core of responsibilities in each of the areas and in some cases even developed weighting systems so that a program that had 700 students would have a different weight for certain types of responsibilities than a program that had only 100 students. It was very successful for us in looking at the specific role of a program director and identifying an appropriate stipend based on the weights and size of the program that we as a faculty worked on together,” Williams says.

Williams has RACI charts for each chair, program director, and administrator within the school. Some have 10 responsibilities listed, and others have as many as 50. The length of each chart depends on the nature of the job and how the department is organized. “One of the things we did across the School of Education was to identify those things that are going to be core to the department chair and core to the program director so that we know that at least efficiency-wise there are certain chains of command that need to be followed,” Williams says.

RACI charts are also useful for departments that decide to have cochairs. These departments can divide the department chair responsibilities based on each person’s areas of expertise or interest. For example, several years ago there were two individuals who were willing to cochair a department, but neither one wanted the full responsibility. So one worked on personnel and budget...
Strengthening the Relationship with Student Affairs

Assumptions based on inadequate knowledge can harm the important relationship between academic affairs and student affairs. When the two divisions work in isolation, negative stereotypes can persist unchallenged: faculty might view student affairs staff as being unduly nurturing to students, and student affairs might view faculty as individualistic and uncaring of students’ well-being. Both divisions need to combat these stereotypes and find ways to meet students’ needs. Here are some things that department chairs can do.

Learn what services student affairs offers. Although faculty may downplay the importance of the work of student affairs and even view student affairs as a drain on scarce resources, many of the services student affairs provides can help students, faculty, and the department.

Invite student affairs staff members to speak at faculty meetings “to reinforce that we’re all in this together,” says Don Rice, chair of the University of West Georgia’s psychology department.

Working with student affairs on one thing can open the door to other possibilities and reinforce the partnership.

For example, at UWG, the EXCEL Center, a student affairs center that provides academic advising to students who have not yet declared a major, the EXCEL Center. “One of the things I hear from faculty who start coming to the EXCEL Center for advising is, ‘I never knew what you did.’ That’s been very useful for bridging this gap [between academic affairs and student affairs],” says Cheryl Rice, director of the EXCEL Center.

Look for collaboration opportunities. At UWG, the first-year seminar, which covers topics such as study skills, university life, and the value of a liberal arts education, is often team-taught by a student affairs staff member and faculty member.

UWG is blurring the line between academic affairs and student affairs by recruiting on campus for part-time student affairs positions, specifically targeting faculty. “We’ve had several faculty members taking administrative positions and very often continuing part time in their teaching. That’s been a tremendous asset for student affairs to understand the faculty’s perspective,” Cheryl Rice says.

Reward faculty for collaborating with student affairs. When faculty volunteer to serve as an academic adviser outside their department, it’s important to recognize that effort, Don Rice says.

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“As part of the process for getting tenure and being promoted we have three major categories: teaching, professional development, and service. For most new professors, most of their activities are in teaching and professional development; however, most professors who already have tenure and are going for promotion might put more of their time into service, and they do get credit for [academic advising outside the department],” Don Rice says.
Linking Accreditation and the Malcolm Baldrige Framework

By Brent D. Ruben, PhD

Accreditation

Accreditation is a collegial process of self- and peer review for improvement of academic quality and public accountability of institutions and programs. When resource and accountability pressures were less intense, the academic mission and programs of colleges and universities provided the primary focus for institutional accreditation. Today, the broad challenges confronting higher education—national, state, and institutional pressures for fiscal constraint, accountability, attention to learning outcomes assessment, productivity measurement, mission clarity and distinctiveness, and institutional structure—all converge in accreditation discussions.

Notable in the evolution is an increasing emphasis on assessment—focusing on measurement and outcomes, as opposed to intentions and inputs. The evolution of accreditation presents a number of challenges, but also offers significant opportunities. These opportunities lie in treating accreditation less as a mandated, periodic, and compartmentalized event and more as an impetus for an empowering, continuing program- or campus-wide process that broadly and systematically engages the community in assessment, systemic planning, and improvement.

The Baldrige Framework

Of the various integrated approaches to organizational assessment, planning, and improvement, none has been more successful or more influential than the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Program administered by the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST). (Baldrige, 2006).

As with accreditation frameworks, the Baldrige approach emphasizes the need to broadly define excellence; value leadership and planning; establish clear, shared, and measurable goals; create effective programs and departments; conduct systematic assessments of outcomes; and engage in comparisons with peers and leaders. The two frameworks also share the position that review, planning, and continuous improvement are fundamental to institutional effectiveness and should be thoroughly integrated into the fabric of every institution aspiring to excellence (Baldrige, 2006 Middle States Commission, 2002; North Central Association, 2004). The most fundamental characteristic of the perspectives is a commitment to an iterative process of mission-based goal setting, assessment, and improvement.

The Baldrige framework has been adopted, adapted, and used for assessment in many business settings, and in 1999, the national Baldrige program advanced versions of the framework for health care and education. Since its introduction, a total of 99 applications have been submitted from higher education departments or institutions to the national program. Winners of the award include the University of Wisconsin-Stout (2001), the University of Northern Colorado, School of Business (2004), and Richland College (2005). There have also been a number of college and university applications to state programs that parallel the Baldrige framework. The most substantial influence of the Baldrige framework in higher education has also been in the evolution of accrediting standards of professional and technical education, and more recently in regional accreditation.

The Excellence in Higher Education Framework

The Baldrige model has served as the basis for the Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) model, which was developed at Rutgers University for use in assessment and planning activities by an entire institution or by individual units of all kinds.

The EHE categories

Like the Baldrige framework, the EHE framework consists of seven categories or themes.

Leadership. This category considers leadership approaches and governance systems used to guide the institution, department, or program; how leaders and leadership practices encourage excellence, innovation, and attention to the needs of individuals, groups, and/or organizations that benefit from the programs and services of the institution, department, or program; and how leadership practices are reviewed and improved.

Strategic planning. This category considers how the mission, vision, and values of the institution, school, department, or program are developed and communicated; how they are translated into goals and plans; and how faculty and staff are engaged in those activities. Also considered are the ways in which goals and plans are translated into action and coordinated throughout the organization.

Beneficiaries and constituencies. This category focuses on the groups that benefit from the programs and services offered by the program, department, or institution being reviewed. This category asks how an organization learns about the needs, perceptions,
Department-less Interdisciplinary Program Provides Flexibility for Returning Adult Students

The Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies (BAiLS) program, an interdisciplinary program at Northern Arizona University designed to meet the needs of returning adult students, is less structured than programs with similar goals at other institutions. This looser structure encourages collaboration among disciplines and provides for greater flexibility, says Larry Gould, associate dean of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences.

The BAiLS program is not housed within a single academic department. Students who enroll in the program take courses from a variety of departments on campus, at other locations throughout the state, or online. “We don’t have special classes for these students. They take the same courses as everybody else. They may just take a different mix of those courses,” Gould says.

Gould chairs a council that includes representatives from the main departments that contribute to the program as well as representatives from the distance learning office, the faculty senate, and the liberal studies council. The council meets twice a month to discuss curriculum changes, funding, and delivery of courses. “It’s easy to create a program. It’s more difficult to deliver it,” Gould says.

The curriculum of the program is similar to those at other institutions, but the program’s structure is very different, Gould says. “I’m doing three [external] interdisciplinary program reviews this year, and so far I haven’t found one that operates as well as ours. I found that all of them have a more defined structure, but that structure gets in the way. [The structure] doesn’t allow for certain types of communication. Rather than creating a totally independent department and isolating that department by hiring people just to be in that department, we draw upon faculty and administrators from across the whole university.”

Because the BAiLS program incorporates courses from different departments, advance planning is essential to ensure that students in the interdisciplinary program can enroll in the courses they need. Gould plans two years in advance to make accommodations for projected student enrollment. Generally the program fills existing course sections, but occasionally student demand will require new sections. If new instructors are needed to teach these courses, the Office of Distributed Learning provides the funding, but each instructor becomes a member of the department in which his or her discipline is housed.

When faculty from other departments work in an interdisciplinary program, the hidden cost of diverting faculty from their primary responsibilities within their own departments may become problematic. To minimize this hidden cost, the BAiLS program does not create its own courses. “We will work with faculty to develop courses when we need them, but the courses remain within the individual departments and retain their course prefix. That way we’re not stealing faculty from those units to teach courses specific to us. If they’re going to work with us to create a course, we ask them to also talk about how the course can benefit their own programs,” Gould says.

Currently, student advising occurs within the individual departments. For example, a student within the BAiLS program whose emphasis is in biology would have an adviser from the biology department. However, all the distance learners are advised in a central office. “We’re moving toward taking all the advising away from the departments and doing it all in one place because it’s our degree,” Gould says.

The program’s biggest strength is the ability to respond to students’ needs. To get a clear understanding of these needs, the programs conduct focus groups with current students, those about to graduate, and recent graduates of the programs. Questions include:

- Why did you choose the program?
- What value do you see in the program?
- How do you think this program will help (or has helped) your career?

The focus groups also ask about individual identity. “By and large, these students have an identity problem. I’m not quite sure who I am. Am I a biology major, or am I an interdisciplinary studies major?” That’s something we continue to work on. The good part of it, though, is that because of the flexibility of the program, students are able to fashion a set of courses with adviser approval that are more likely to meet their needs,” Gould says.

“I don’t want to sound like someone who says, ‘The students will tell us what they want, and eventually, like a kid, will eat everything that’s good for him.’ We know what we want in the program, but there are places where we can make changes without corrupting what we believe is a good set of learning outcomes,” Gould says.

The flexibility of the program enables students to combine diverse interests. For example, one student was able to combine his interests in criminal justice and environmental studies. As a criminal justice major, he would have been able to take perhaps up to nine hours in environmental studies. With the interdisciplinary program, he was able to take the basic criminal justice require-
and priorities of those groups and how that information is used to enhance the organization’s reputation and working relationships with those constituencies.

Programs and services. This category focuses on the programs and services offered by the institution, department, or program under review and how their effectiveness is maintained and enhanced. The most important operational and support services are also reviewed.

Faculty/staff and workplace. This category considers how the program, department, or institution being reviewed recruits and retains faculty and staff, encourages excellence and engagement, creates and maintains a positive workplace culture and climate, and promotes and facilitates personal and professional development.

Assessment and information use. This category focuses on how the program, department, or institution assesses its efforts to fulfill its mission and aspirations and on the effectiveness of its programs and services. Also considered is how assessment information is used for improving programs and services; day-to-day decision making; and the quality of the program, department, or institution.

Outcomes and achievements. This category asks for information and evidence to document or demonstrate the quality and effectiveness of the program, department, or institution.

The EHE review process
EHE is commonly used as a framework for a retreat or workshop. Typically, the workshop consists of the following step-by-step process for each of the seven categories (Ruben, 2005b):

- Discussing the basic themes and standards for the category
- “Brainstorming” a list of strengths and areas for improvement for the unit with respect to the category (to be prioritized and integrated into action plans later in the workshop)
- Reviewing “best” practices in the category as practiced by leading organizations
- Scoring the unit in the category on a 0 to 100 percent scale to capture perceptions of the extent to which the program, department, or institution is fulfilling the standards of the category
- Identifying problems and solutions that can visibly improve day-to-day operations;
- Increases and enhances communication.

The combination of the accreditation and Baldrige frameworks results in an approach that can be extremely useful as a guide to assessment, planning, and improvement in administrative, service, and student life organizations, as well as in academic departments and programs or entire institutions.

References


Brent D. Ruben is a distinguished professor of communication and organizational psychology, and founder and executive director of the Center for Organizational Development and Leadership at Rutgers University.
RACI CHARTS...From Page 1

issues, and the other worked on student issues.

By clearly articulating the responsibilities of a department chair or program director, faculty members who consider taking on those roles will have a better understanding of what the position entails and what skills are needed to succeed in that position, Williams says.

Williams uses RACI charts to determine how a faculty member should be compensated for his or her administrative role. She uses stipends to compensate faculty for their administrative work. Another option would be to offer release time.

“I was trying to find a way to reimburse them not only in money but to acknowledge the amount of time that was going into administrative activities. I have been an academic vice president and if somebody came to me and had a well-developed RACI chart that showed me the types of administrative responsibilities that faculty had and I had the budget, it would be clear to me and I would be able to make a decision on that, whereas most of the time, the people come in and say, ‘Faculty would like some release time,’ and they don’t have anything in black and white to show the nature of the responsibilities and amount of time that relates to those responsibilities,” Williams says.

Recognition of their work and the potential of receiving additional compensation for it have encouraged faculty buy-in, Williams says.

“The first time we used RACI charts, the faculty were just so happy that their work was being acknowledged in a way that shows differentiation of programs, and they were happy about the stipends,” Williams says.

Using RACI charts also has improved communication because the charts list who needs to be contacted when an action is taken, Williams says.

Williams and her colleagues refer to the RACI charts regularly, particularly when there is a major organizational change within a department such as the creation of a new program.

RACI charts have the potential of identifying professional development needs and articulating to administrators and boards of trustees the complexity of faculty members’ many responsibilities.

“In academia we don’t spend enough time brainstorming about the nonteaching responsibilities we have. When we continue to give administrative responsibilities to faculty who are very often underprepared for them and pretend that they are just able to do them without assistance, I think we’re doing them a disservice, and we’re doing the university and our students a disservice. I think how we begin is by looking at those nonteaching responsibilities that faculty have.

“I don’t think the board of trustees and academic administrators who have been out of the classroom awhile understand the full nature of expectations we’re putting on faculty today. And we cannot continue to say faculty have to do it and not give them some type of appropriate compensation whether in time or money,” Williams says.

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DEPARTMENT-LESS...From Page 4

ments and 24 hours of environmental studies courses.

Most of the students in the interdisciplinary program are adult learners. There are higher percentages of minorities, single mothers, and women than in the rest of the university. “These people have a fairly good idea of what’s going to help them succeed. [In focus groups] we may ask them, ‘Why do you want something like intercultural education?’ They’ll say, ‘Because that’s what I do. I talk to people from very different cultures, and I need to know how to better interact with them,’” Gould says.

Based on a recent program review, the structure of the program will be changed from one that offers only bachelor of arts degrees to one that also offers bachelor of science degrees. Under the current BA-only program, “adult learners suffer through four semesters of a modern language. They’re in their 40s and 50s; they’re not going to pick up a modern language. They’re past that. But they can pick up statistics and research methods [a requirement for a BS],” Gould says.

In addition to serving adult students, the program also serves as a way of retaining students who, for whatever reason, need to leave campus before graduating. “We can usually keep these students by changing them from on-campus to distance students, and because the program is flexible enough, we can usually get them all the courses they need,” Gould says.

“For anybody contemplating doing something like this, I would urge them to try to address the needs of more than a single group of students. Then you bring in the color, the flavor, the diversity that allows younger students to learn from older students, and the older students will feel more assimilated into the student body. If you have a class that has nothing but 40-year-olds, those students are not assimilated into the university culture. If you have a student body that has nothing but 21-year-olds in it, they don’t have the opportunity to learn from their peers who are a bit older,” Gould says.

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Facility need to be very careful about how they commit their time and energy, so any potential partnership with student affairs need to be compelling and clearly articulated.

“We in student affairs, specifically in housing and residence life, always want to get faculty involved, but I think it’s really important for us to consider how we can best do that without being an additional draw on time and effort,” says Michelle Rodems, residence coordinator at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington.

One major partnership between academic and student affairs at UNCW is the Cornerstone Learning Communities Program, a program in which first-year students take eight of their 15 credit hours as part of a learning community that features linked courses and integrative seminars taught in a specially designed residence hall.

New residence hall, new program

The idea for the program began in 2001 among several department chairs in the College of Arts and Sciences as a way to increase interdisciplinary study and reenergize the humanities. A learning communities steering committee comprised of department chairs and representatives from the College of Arts and Sciences Office and the Division of Student Affairs attended the National Learning Communities Summer Institute in 2002 and developed a plan to launch a learning communities pilot program in fall 2003.

Cornerstone Hall, a new residence hall, was scheduled to open at the same time, and the steering committee was able to work with the architect to modify the design of the building to better suit the program’s needs.

The learning community model the steering committee came up with consists of eight learning communities of 25 students each. The program is offered to first-year students on a first-come, first-served basis. Students who sign up for the program select a learning community based on their interests. Each learning community consists of a pair of linked basic studies courses and an integrative seminar. Past learning communities included “In Search of Myself: Stories of Culture,” which linked an anthropology course with an English course, and “Talking Heads: Politics and Public Speaking,” which linked a political science course with a communication studies course.

The linked courses are scheduled so that students take them in the same room, one after the other. The integrative seminar combines content from the freshman seminar with themes from the two linked courses. Faculty members from the respective departments teach the basic studies courses, and a student affairs staff member, academic adviser, or librarian teaches the integrative seminars.

Recruiting faculty

One of the challenges early on was convincing faculty to participate. “Some faculty members had a perception that some of those people maybe didn’t have a rigorous enough academic background, and they questioned the rigor of what would be offered in those integrative seminars,” says Claudia Stack, codirector of Cornerstone Learning Communities. “I spoke to that and told them, for example, I have an undergraduate background that is very strong in the classics—I translated Plato as an undergraduate—and that I would like to teach an integrative seminar that included some western philosophy. I was able to give them a concrete example of something rigorous that they understood.”

One thing that got faculty members’ attention was the $3,000 stipend offered by the provost for each faculty member who participates. The program calls for proposals in the fall, a year before the learning communities are to begin. In some cases, faculty have a clear idea of which courses they want to teach and with whom. In other cases, the steering committee matches faculty and integrative seminar instructors.

Linking courses

By January, the learning community faculty teams commit to the program, which also includes mandatory participation in a learning community workshop in May. The workshop includes best practices presentations and time for teams to work together on modifying their courses. These are courses that exist in the basic studies curriculum. They do get modified somewhat, but not a huge amount because I think faculty feel obligated to cover most or all of the material that’s laid out for the course,” Stack says.

The workshop also serves as an opportunity for faculty to get to know the integrative seminar instructors. This is an important relationship because the integrative seminar instructors work closely with students outside of class and can help faculty better understand the issues these students face.

Sean Ahlum, marketing and computing consultant in the Office of Housing and Residence Life, is an integrative seminar instructor who has enough flexibility in his schedule to attend the same classes that the students in his learning community attend. Ahlum meets with students once a week outside of the basic
It’s Merely Academic

By John N. McDaniel, PhD

Oh, brother, here we go again. The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) has just issued a notice that the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act has prompted a legislative battle over control of academics at colleges and universities receiving federal dollars. The College Access and Opportunity Act (HR 609) calls for greater “transparency” in matters pertaining to tuition and, most pointedly, transfer credit, with institutions being virtually required to accept credit from all other institutions recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education. This is offered, we are told, in the name easing the burden of students and parents baffled by the intricacies of attending college in these parlously complicated times.

“Transparency” is one of those slippery words that can mean whatever the user would like it to mean. It used to be that “transparency” was a bad thing: “Oh, how transparent his motives are!” Now it is a good thing: “Oh, how transparent this policy is!” Thus, the word is not as transparent as it might appear to be. What might be lurking behind the apparent transparency?

Certainly one “intransparency” is the locus of authority in such areas as the curriculum. If states and the feds get the final say-so on the acceptability of academic transfer credits on college campuses, where does that leave regional accreditation agencies and (even more forlornly) the campus itself? Here we might ask the question that Johnny Carson made famous when upstaged by the boisterous dominance of an unruly guest: “When did I lose control?” Funny coming from Johnny. Not so funny here.

College campuses have been increasingly marginalized in recent times in matters of autonomy, as state and federal agencies continue to assert their own dominance and control. “One size fits all” just seems so fair, doesn’t it? The American way. A course is a course is a course, whether offered by Harvard or the local barber college (if accredited, we should add). And think of the ease of transferring to the Ivies, or wherever. Seemingly seamless! And the savings!

All of this is quite transparent, as far as the governmental eye can see: win-win for the states and the paying public, without a downside in sight. And as for campus autonomy… well, isn’t that concern merely academic?

What do you think? Send your comments to partingshot@magnapubs.com

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LEARNING COMMUNITIES…

From Page 7

studies classes. The seminar covers things such as library skills, health and wellness, and technology skills while integrating the themes that come up in the two linked courses. Since Ahlum attends those classes, he is in an excellent position to help students understand the thematic connections between the courses.

Ahlum meets regularly with the faculty in his learning community and shares his insights about the students’ experiences inside and outside the classroom. “There’s so much programming and so much education going on outside of the classroom. It’s really nice for the professors to be able to get a sense of that through their integrative seminar instructor,” Ahlum says.

Each learning community has a peer mentor, an undergraduate student who works with the learning community faculty and attends the integrative seminar. These peer mentors keep regular journals and contact reports of their interactions with students and meet regularly with the learning community faculty.

Rodems says that students are more likely to express their concerns to peer mentors than to the faculty members.

Outcomes

Although there is not yet much assessment data to analyze the effectiveness of the Cornerstone Learning Communities, those involved point to several positive outcomes thus far.

“After being in a learning community for a while, students start to look for other connections in their other classes, which I think is pretty neat,” Stack says.

Faculty benefit as well. “I think faculty get a more holistic picture of the student. They see that the student is engaging in activities and relationships around campus and they’re not all class-related, and they realized how important the professionals in other areas are to the students’ development,” Stack says.

Faculty also learn from each other by observing each other’s teaching in a setting that is not a performance evaluation, Stack says.

The Cornerstone Learning Communities program has opened lines of communication between academic and student affairs that were haphazard prior to the program and usually based on chance personal connections across campus, Rodems says.

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Parting Shot

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