



OHIO
UNIVERSITY

QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

MARCH 7, 2008

Background and History

Ohio University was invited and joined the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) in 2002. While contemplating the decision to join AQIP, the institution participated in the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) and learned from the results of this survey that while Ohio University undergraduate students felt very engaged with the institution and their studies as upperclassmen, first year students reported disengagement with the university. After analyzing the results of the survey, the institution was also concerned that such disengagement with the institution during the first year was also having a negative effect on student retention numbers between the first and second year. It should be noted that while first to second year retention numbers were and remain acceptable for a public institution the size of Ohio University (greater than 80%) a trend was being observed in which these values were beginning to slide. The results of the NSSE were such a concern to the institution, that then President Robert Glidden and Interim Provost Gary Schumacher began a campus wide dialog on this subject in order to gather ideas and opinions on how the institution could improve the first year experience and engagement with the institution and hopefully reverse the negative retention trend the institution had been experiencing.

As a result of these discussions, student engagement and retention was identified as a major area of focus for quality improvement for the institution and because of this emphasis the first four action projects the institution became dedicated to with our participation in AQIP focused on campus initiatives to improve the first year experience of Ohio University students and first year student engagement. These action projects were created and refined during the first AQIP strategy forum the institution participated in during June 2002. Since 2002, and through the work on these initial action projects, the institution has committed to several projects and initiatives to improve student engagement on campus and is now beginning to see the fruits of this labor. The details of these projects and progress on these initiatives will be described in the section below.

Numerous changes have occurred at Ohio University since the institution began its participation in AQIP in 2002, and it is the belief of many on campus that these changes have put the institution in a better position to participate in quality improvement initiatives than it was when we joined AQIP in 2002.

In 2004, Ohio University appointed its 20th President, Dr. Roderick J. McDavis and in 2005, Dr. Kathy Krendl was appointed as Provost of the institution. Since President McDavis took office there has been a complete turnover in the five vice president positions which report directly to the president and a restructuring of the reporting lines of the Chief Information Officer (CIO), Vice President for Research and the regional campus administration. The CIO position is now a vice president appointment who answers directly to the President and the Vice President for Research and regional campuses now report through the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost. Dr. Krendl's title was changed from Provost to Executive Vice President and Provost in May of 2007. In addition to the upper administration, there has also been a significant turnover in the leadership of the individual academic colleges since 2005. Of the 10 academic deans who lead their respective colleges, 5 were hired just within the last three years.

This large recent turnover in academic leadership and drain on the institutional memory of the university has posed a challenge for the university in its efforts to continue the momentum on pursuing quality improvement projects as well as educating and communicating to the campus the goals and accomplishments through our participation in AQIP. However, the new leadership of the institution has been very supportive of the quality improvement philosophy and the institution's participation in AQIP.

Perhaps the most significant change in the operation of Ohio University within the last four years is the preparation of the institutional strategic plan called *Vision Ohio* (<http://www.ohio.edu/vision/>). *Vision Ohio* is the first strategic/educational plan prepared by the institution since the late 1970's. When President McDavis assumed the Presidency in 2004 he immediately charged then Interim Provost Kathy Krendl with the task of creating a campus structure to develop a strategic plan which would guide major decisions and directions the institution would follow in the future. Beginning in the 2004-05 academic year, Ohio University utilized a broad based task force with representatives from all of its major stakeholder groups including students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members to prepare a plan in which the guiding principles of the institution were identified and goals and ambitions were set in all areas of its academic mission including both undergraduate and graduate education, research, faculty/staff/student quality and diversity, infrastructure, environment and national prominence. The institution in 2005-06 then employed a series of implementation teams to identify and prioritize specific goals and initiatives in each of these areas. This work has now created a quality improvement "blueprint" for the institution for the next 15 to 20 years and has most recently lead to the drafting of a five-year action implementation plan.

Ohio University prepared its Systems Portfolio in 2005 and received the appraisal of this document in March 2006. The results of the Systems Appraisal were discussed extensively with the AQIP Advisory Committee and the Executive Vice President and Provost. The advisory committee analyzed the results in detail and paid significant attention to the opportunities identified in the appraisal which were common to quality improvement areas identified as priorities within the *Vision Ohio* Strategic Plan. Two

such areas of common ground were the creation and assessment of common learning outcomes for general education and the concerns of how the goals and ambitions of the *Vision Ohio* plan will be implemented. Ohio University has used the feedback from the appraisal with the strategic plan to create two new action projects which will address both of these issues.

Since 2005, the development of the *Vision Ohio* Strategic Plan and the five-year action implementation plan has been instrumental in guiding institutional quality improvement initiatives and the direction the university has taken in its participation in AQIP. The institution as a whole is very excited about its future and using the strategic plan to guide quality improvement on campus. Like other institutions of higher learning, Ohio University will continue to face severe challenges in the future including shrinking budgets and subsidy from the State of Ohio, a decreased traditional student population base and increased pressure from the public and government on accountability measures. However, the institution believes with the extensive planning that has been completed and the ongoing refinement of this plan, we are currently in a very strong position to accept these challenges and strategically invest finances and human effort towards quality improvement measures to adequately serve our students, faculty and the Southeastern Ohio region.

The institution is looking forward to using the Quality Checkup to discuss and strategize effective ways to better integrate the institutional strategic planning process with quality improvement and AQIP.

Progress on AQIP Action Projects

As mentioned above, when Ohio University joined the AQIP accreditation track in 2002, a campus decision was made to focus our quality improvement efforts on improving student engagement and the college experience for our first year students. Three of the four initial action projects developed when Ohio University joined AQIP were specifically focused on investing in campus initiatives to improve these areas and hopefully reverse the downward first year retention trend the institution had been experiencing. In this section of the report, projects which were started as a result of work on these initial action projects will be described along with the progress which has been made.

Since the preparation of the *Vision Ohio* strategic plan, quality improvement efforts at the university have expanded into areas which have been identified in the plan and by the implementation teams as institutional priorities. These priorities have directed the creation of our three most recent action projects which focus on the creation of common learning outcomes of Ohio University graduates, identifying areas in graduate education for strategic investments and creating an infrastructure for the integration of quality improvement efforts and AQIP activities with the institutional strategic plan. While the institution has not abandoned its efforts to improve student engagement and the first year experience, we are confident that these initiatives are getting a firm hold into the campus culture and are using our current action projects for new strategic challenges.

Student Engagement and the First Year Experience

In 2005, Ohio University began a partnership with the Policy Center on the First Year of College as a member of the Foundations of Excellence initiative. A Task Force on the first year, consisting of faculty, students, and university administrators, who had expertise in student engagement and retention, was created to work with the Policy Center to assess Ohio University's accomplishments and weaknesses in student engagement and learning during the first year.

During the first year of the partnership, the task force successfully completed the guided self study required of Foundations of Excellence member institutions and as part of this process adopted nine of the Foundation of Excellence Dimensions. Since 2004, Ohio University has hosted two site visits/workshops facilitated by Dr. Betsy Barefoot, Co-Director of the Policy Center.

Ohio University continued its partnership with the Policy Center on the First Year of College during the 2006-07 academic year. The Task Force on the First Year completed its initial work with the Policy Center to assess Ohio University's accomplishments and weaknesses in student engagement and learning during the first year.

The Task Force completed its Foundations of Excellence final report in 2007 which included the "report card" prepared for the institution by the Policy Center. This document which can be found on the First Year Experience (FYE) web site (<http://www.ohio.edu/univcollege/fye>) contains an analysis of the current state of the first year experience at the institution and it also details a total of 33 recommendations made by the task force to enhance FYE at Ohio University. The task force divided their recommendations over a three year period.

The analysis of the FYE praised the institution for several of its initiatives and programs which began as work from the institution's initial action projects. The initiatives/programs cited were the Learning Communities program, Common Reading Experience, Supplemental Instruction, Majors Fair and a renewed commitment to faculty development for having positive effects on the FYE of Ohio University students. However, the analysis demonstrated that aside from the pockets of excellent programs, the institution continues to lack a centralized organizational infrastructure and philosophical approach to the FYE which will be needed if Ohio University is to be successful in providing a positive FYE to all of its students.

Learning Communities

The creation and continued expansion of the Learning Communities program has been a major quality improvement success of the institution (www.ohio.edu/learningcommunities). This program began in 1999 as a pilot project in

four first year residence halls. The very next year with funding from an internal grant, the program was expanded to six communities and it has continued to expand to the point where in the fall of 2007 the institution supported 115 learning communities with over 1900 first year students participating. The program has also been developed in a variety of academic disciplines with each academic college at Ohio University sponsoring a community (<http://www.ohio.edu/learningcommunities/communities.cfm>). The future of the learning communities looks equally as bright as the continued expansion of the program is prominently mentioned as a goal in the *Vision Ohio* strategic/five year academic plan. It is estimated that in the fall of 2008, 60% of all first year Ohio University students will be participants in a Learning Community (LC) and the goal of the academic plan is to increase this percentage by 6% per year for the next five years. In 2007, the University College, where the majority of the undecided students at the institution are advised, began to require all first year students to participate in a learning community.

In 2002, the institution began collecting data related to the effectiveness of the learning communities program in improving retention of first year students, academic performance and student engagement/satisfaction with the university. This data supports the hypothesis that learning communities do have a positive effect on institutional retention and academic performance. We have seen as much as a 9% increase in the fall to winter quarter retention rates of students who participate in a RLC verses those who chose not to. Our data has also demonstrated a small but significant increase in the grade point averages of first year students who are LC participants.

In addition to the LC program, the university also supports learning communities in the more challenging first year science courses such as in the biological sciences, mathematics and chemistry disciplines. These learning communities are very different from the clustered LC models most utilized in that they focus on a single course and utilize a peer-led tutoring lab in which the students who participate in the community work together on solving scientific problems or participate in discussions of scientific concepts.

Ohio University is highly supportive of the learning communities program considering the strong evidence which exists that demonstrates the program is beneficial in promoting first year student engagement and has a positive effect on academic performance and student satisfaction.

Academic Student Services

Ohio University offers a wide variety of academic student services designed to promote academic success. These service offices are typically housed within the University College and help students develop effective study skills, adjust to college life and provides tutoring and supplemental instruction services. Because of their relationship to student engagement and retention, many of these services have been expanded as the result of the university's commitment to quality improvement and AQIP.

The Academic Advancement Center (www.ohio.edu/aac/) offers tutoring help and supplemental instruction in classes which have been identified as having a high failure rate. These services are communicated to first year students and their parents in the summer precollege orientation and are also announced in many classes during the first week of the fall term. The center also staffs math and computer labs where students can drop in during regular business hours or make appointments for help with math assignments or learn new computer skills.

With the grand opening of the new Baker University Center in January 2007 came the opening of the Allen Student Help Center (www.ohio.edu/helpcenter/). The center serves all undergraduate students of Ohio University, but is a particularly important resource for first year students. The center's location in the university center is central to campus and highly accessible to all students. The help center is staffed during the work week until 7pm and on Sundays from 1-5pm, to be assessable as possible to students. The center provides academic guidance to students as well as study skills assistance and academic success workshops.

The University College continues to expand its course offerings in study and reading skills development and college adjustment courses. These courses have been found to be very effective at helping first year students develop study and reading skills for academic success as well as enhancing their university experience.

College Welcome Weekend and the Common Reading Experience

As a means to promote first year student engagement and a "connection" to Ohio University, the institution in 2005 began hosting college "Welcome Weekends" for first year students within the various academic colleges. The welcome weekends are held the weekend before fall term begins and they provide a chance for first year students to meet many of the faculty and student services staff in the college where their major resides. During welcome weekend, the students are also organized into small groups where they discuss the common reading experience book which had been assigned during the summer precollege orientation.

Facilities Renovations to Promote Student Engagement

Ohio University is currently in a renovation phase in order to modernize its residence hall system. In addition, this last fall the institution opened a new residence for upperclass (junior/senior) students. As part of the renovation planning process, consultants were retained for the development of a Comprehensive Housing Master Plan. This program development process for both the renovation of existing residence halls and the construction of the new halls included a clear focus on creating common space areas to promote interaction and engagement among Ohio University students.

The university also continues to promote academic excellence through its residential hall system by the creation of residence halls which maintain a scholastic emphasis. In the 02-03 academic year, Read Hall was converted to a scholastic emphasis residence hall in

order to promote academic engagement within the student population. The success of this experiment, as judged by its popularity with students, has now been expanded to a second residence hall (Johnson Hall). Depending on the popularity of the scholastic residence halls, more of the halls in the system may be converted in order to promote student engagement and academic excellence.

The second floor of Alden Library has also been recently renovated into a student Learning Commons area (<http://www.library.ohiou.edu/serv/lc/index.html>). The renovation of this floor was completed in 2005. The Learning Commons area has multiple computers for use by students and several meeting rooms for students to work in study groups or on group projects. The commons area is fully staffed and has been extremely popular with Ohio University students since its opening.

Undergraduate Research Support

Ohio University believes one on one interaction with faculty is critical to the academic development and engagement of our students. As a means to promote such interaction, Ohio University provides both financial and other institutional support to encourage undergraduate research. The Provost Office provides research funds to support research and research related travel for Ohio University undergraduates and for the fifth consecutive year the Vice President for Research has sponsored the Research and Creative Activity Fair. The fair provides a forum for undergraduate and graduate students to present their research and scholarship in a poster format with cash prizes awarded for the best presentations. Each year the fair continues to increase in popularity; in 2007 over 400 undergraduate and graduate students presented research projects completed under the supervision of Ohio University faculty.

Professional Development of Faculty and Student Engagement

Quality improvement initiatives to increase student engagement and active learning have not been limited to programs which directly affect students. The institution's philosophy in taking on student engagement as an initial set of action projects has been to improve programmatic practices for Ohio University students and faculty. Since joining AQIP in 2002, the institution has invested significant efforts and resources in faculty development opportunities to improve teaching effectiveness of faculty and support student engagement and active learning in and out of the classroom.

Beginning in 2002, Ohio University sponsored three annual faculty workshops on Critical Thinking facilitated by Dr. Richard Paul, an expert on the subject. During the past five years, the university has also organized numerous faculty development symposiums under the title of "Spotlight on Learning" (<http://www.ohiou.edu/learningfair/>) where Ohio University faculty showcase innovative teaching methods/practices and research to other Ohio University faculty. Financial resources in the form of "Best Practices Grants" have also been awarded to Ohio University faculty for the development of innovative teaching methodologies and travel to external workshops to develop new teaching skills.

The New Faculty Welcome (<http://www.citl.ohiou.edu/faculty/index.cfm?action=agenda>) which serves as an orientation to new faculty before classes begin for fall term, was expanded to a two day event in 2005 in order to include faculty development topics in the areas of classroom/course technologies and syllabus construction. The idea of expanding the new faculty orientation to include these types of professional development opportunities and the sponsoring of teaching workshops and symposia is a step towards engraining an institutional culture of supporting innovative teaching that leads to active learning and student engagement.

More recently, Ohio University has made a major investment in faculty professional development by the creation of the Faculty Commons area of Alden Library which houses the newly established Center for Teaching and Learning (<http://www.library.ohiou.edu/fc/>). Dr. Laurie Hatch was hired last year as the director of the center. Dr. Hatch has extensive background in faculty development, most recently as the Director of the Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment at California State University at Monterey Bay. The Faculty Commons and the Center for Teaching and Learning will become the centerpiece for faculty development activities on campus and is the latest in the commitment Ohio University has given to quality instruction and faculty development.

Ohio University has invested a great deal of effort and resources in developing academic programming practices which address student engagement, satisfaction and student retention. Assessment of the effectiveness of many of these programs and the measures which have been used in the assessment has been an ongoing challenge for the university. Over the past few years, Ohio University has seen the academic profile of its incoming class improve and last fall we observed our fall to winter quarter retention rate stabilize for the first time in several years. The last NSSE survey which was administered to freshman students in 2005, also showed a slight improvement in reported freshman student engagement. The NEES will be given to the 2007-08 freshman class and hopefully this trend will continue. While these improvements have been slow in coming, the institution is very optimistic that these improvements will continue and we will begin seeing the “fruits of our labor” with this initiative for years to come.

Development of Common Learning Outcomes

The development and implementation of common learning outcomes for all Ohio University graduates is one of the most recent action projects of the institution and an issue which was identified in the institutional strategic plan and the Systems Portfolio review. The first goal of this action project was to create a team to identify the common learning outcomes expected of our graduates and the second goal was to develop a process by which the current general education program could be assessed in its ability to deliver these outcomes. The final goal of the project will be to develop an assessment plan to determine if the outcomes are being achieved.

The institution accomplished the first goal of this action project during the 2006-07 academic year. The Provost and Chair of the Faculty Senate appointed a General

Education Outcomes Committee and charged the committee with identifying common learning outcomes expected of all Ohio University students. Another action of the committee was to identify a mechanism to assess the current general education program in its effectiveness to produce the desired outcomes and suggest assessment methods to determine if the objectives/outcomes have been met.

The committee met throughout the academic year and produced a final report in June of 2007. This comprehensive report is found on the Ohio University web site at the following URL: <http://www.ohiou.edu/instres/assessments/genedlnobj2007.pdf> and the recommendations are briefly summarized below.

The committee made a total of nine recommendations in the final report which included recommendations regarding common learning objectives and outcomes for each of the tiers of the current three tier general education program. The committee also suggested charging the University Curriculum Council (UCC) with the task of assessing the current curriculum of the general education program in achieving the desired objectives/outcomes. The committee believed the UCC was in the best position to assess the current general education program and make the necessary adjustments to the curriculum.

The committee also concluded that because the general education curriculum is “diffused throughout the entire university” the responsibility for assessing the recommended common objectives/outcomes lies ultimately at the primary academic unit (department/school/) level. The committee recommended implementing the assessment methods previously recommended by the General Education Assessment Committee of 1995 which suggested multiple methods including standardized tests, alumni surveys and student interviews. The committee also recommended that dedicated faculty who regularly teach general education courses collaborate with the Office of Institutional Research to implement an assessment plan and the university invests in increasing faculty knowledge of assessment techniques and how to best use learning objectives and outcomes in their programs/courses.

Enhancement of Graduate Programs

Ohio University is a comprehensive educational institution, offering a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate programs. As the institution began its focus on quality improvement initiatives through the AQIP process, it was important not to limit these activities solely to undergraduate education. In difficult budgetary times it is important that sound decisions be made to selectively invest in academic and research programs for the greater benefit of the institution and the southeastern Ohio region.

The goal of this action project is to develop a process to accurately and fairly evaluate the potential of graduate and research programs, and selectively enhance these programs from a financial standpoint in order to improve the educational benefit to students and prominence within the discipline. An effective process to accomplish this objective will help the institution meet two of its goals from the *Vision Ohio* institutional strategic plan;

strengthening graduate education and increasing the national prominence of the institution.

In January of 2006, the Provost appointed a Graduate Education and Research Board (GERB) to develop and oversee the evaluation process described above. In May of 2006 the board announced its first request for proposals (RFP) to support major program initiatives in graduate education and research. During 2007, the board reviewed a total of 6 proposals and targeted three of the proposals for external review from experts within the program discipline. Once the external review process is complete, the GERB will make its final recommendations to The Provost regarding program enhancement.

The Future of Quality Improvement and AQIP at Ohio University

The creation of the *Vision Ohio* institutional strategic plan has placed Ohio University in a better position to participate in quality improvement projects and make the most of the institution's involvement in AQIP. The strategic planning process created an infrastructure to obtain campus-wide, stakeholder based input on goals and objectives important to the institution as a whole.

Ohio University is now facing the challenge of integrating the implementation of the goals of the strategic plan with quality improvement activities and AQIP. This integration is critical for the institution to efficiently use its limited resources to achieve the goals of the strategic plan but also focus efforts and energy on the quality improvement philosophy rooted in AQIP. The institution realizes it cannot achieve all of the goals of the strategic plan by developing them into effective quality improvement action projects, however by thoughtfully and effectively integrating future plans for participation in AQIP with the implementation of the strategic plan, the institution can best utilize the AQIP process to achieve the institution goals outlined in *Vision Ohio*.

Considering the current focus on strategic planning and implementation of these goals, the institution is looking forward to investing energy during the Quality Checkup visit in planning how we can best utilize our resources and efforts to focus future quality improvement initiatives in achieving the goals and future ambitions of the institution.