

2014 NCA Self-Study

Eastern Illinois University

2014 Fall Forum
September 17, 2014

Site Visit Dates

Monday, October 20 through Wednesday, October 22, 2014

Site Visit Team

1. Dr. Kathie S. Gilbert, Western New Mexico University, Site Visit Chair
2. Dr. Bin Ning, Eastern Michigan University
3. Dr. Fernando P. Delgado, University of Wisconsin-River Falls
4. Dr. Karen H. Larwin, Youngstown State University
5. Dr. Donald F. Larsson, Minnesota State University, Mankato
6. Dr. Peter J. Kasvinski, Youngstown State University
7. Dr. Hassimi Traore, University of Wisconsin, Whitewater

2014 EIU Self-Study **Strengths, Initiatives, Challenges, & Opportunities**

Criterion 1 Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

Strengths and Initiatives

- The university mission statement, revised in 2007 through a process suited to Eastern's focus on broad representation and shared governance, guides day-to-day operations of academic programs and support services, as well as long-range planning and budgeting. Examples of mission-focused planning have included the Campus Master Plan in 2010, the Strategic Plan in 2012, the Strategic Enrollment Plan in 2014, and the Program Analysis process in 2014. Eastern expects each individual department to specifically identify how its mission explicitly aligns with the mission of the university. All major planning statements and 77% of Eastern's department mission statements are available online.
- Eastern's mission statement articulates that the university is committed to diversity and inclusion. This commitment is evidenced by the university's broad definition of diversity and its resulting programming, support services, and funding commitments.
- Eastern's mission also demonstrates commitment to the public good through responsible citizenship. That commitment is exemplified by Eastern's naming to President Obama's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll in 2012 and 2013.
- Eastern's funding decisions (as indicated by the university's audit reports) and the primacy of teaching in faculty contracts demonstrate that Eastern's educational responsibilities take priority over other purposes.

Criterion 2 Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible

Strengths and Initiatives

- Through its extensive oversight and policies, Eastern ensures that the university operates with integrity in all areas. Eastern follows fair and ethical policies and processes for its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff. The governing board of Eastern is sufficiently autonomous to make

decisions in the best interests of the institution and to assure its integrity. Several laws and regulations make transparent the mission and work of the BOT. Furthermore, three faculty-run organizations, CAA, COTE, and CGS, work in conjunction with the BOT and the faculty union to ensure academic integrity.

- Through web portals and some print materials, Eastern presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with regard to programs, requirements, faculty, staff, costs, control, and accreditation relationships.
- Eastern is committed to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning. Through Internal Governing Policies (IGPs) and public statements by the administration, Eastern actively encourages and promotes academic freedom and freedom of expression.
- Eastern ensures that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly. Research and scholarly practice are enhanced at Eastern through a comprehensive set of compliance policies about which faculty and students are well educated.

Challenges and Opportunities

- At this time, IGP 3 does not require that background checks be performed on all new faculty hires. The self-study indicated that in order to ensure that Eastern implements best practices regarding campus safety, a review and update of this policy is indicated.

Criterion 3 Teaching & Learning: Quality, Resource, Support

The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

Strengths and Initiatives

- A productive, highly qualified faculty dedicated to teaching and learning and the discovery of knowledge.
- Small classes and a small student-to-faculty ratio that provides excellent opportunity for faculty to mentor student research and development.
- A dedicated, well-qualified staff, who provide services and learning opportunities appropriate to the needs of the students.
- Accessible faculty and staff in both curricular and co-curricular programs.
- A robust faculty development program, dedicated to 1) improving teaching and learning for our diverse student body, 2) developing technology in support of teaching and learning, and 3) facilitating faculty research.
- A solid technology infrastructure for teaching and learning.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Lower than desired scores on the Collegiate Learning Assessment and state demographic shifts impacting enrollments have motivated planning for the university and its academic programs. An important first response to this challenge has been the instituting of the new learning goals and the concerted effort by programs to make sure their curricula are relevant and accessible for 21st century learners. Now that the learning goals have been adopted, they must be infused into all undergraduate degree programs.
- Online learning and new delivery systems have increased at Eastern during the past 10 years. Efforts to maintain Eastern's current levels of high-quality education across all modes of delivery must continue if the university is to keep pace with these trends.
- Additional funding is needed to support faculty and student research, creative activity, and scholarship. In addition, a process is needed for more complete, centralized tracking of faculty scholarly and creative output.

Criterion 4 Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Strengths and Initiatives

- Eastern demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs through clear policies and procedures for awarding course credit, credit for experiential learning, and transfer credit; regular internal and external program reviews including maintenance of specialized accreditation for 36 programs; and evaluation of the success of graduates through centralized and departmental tracking procedures.
- Eastern is committed to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing, robust assessment of student learning. Assessment data were the impetus for a multi-year study by Eastern's central curriculum body (CAA), which resulted in a five-year plan for improving student learning outcomes. Assessment within most academic programs has matured and most assess major as well as the university's undergraduate or graduate learning goals. Co-curricular assessment of student development goals is demonstrated through NSSE data as well as program assessment in areas such as residential life, health education, and volunteer experiences.
- Eastern provides supports and programming and practices that have resulted in graduation and retention rates that are well above the national benchmarks for regional, comprehensive institutions. Members from academic and student affairs on the CORE committee have met with an external consultant; spear-headed broad initiatives such as the Student Success Center, Prowl, and the Early Alert System; developed resources for at-risk populations; and continue to focus and refine retention efforts with the recent purchase and implementation of the Retention Predictor Model. The attention Eastern pays to individual students as illustrated by the retention analysis and program development is a hallmark of the institution.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Although Eastern has a strong history of assessing its curriculum, the assessment of the co-curriculum is much newer, and NSSE is the only centralized assessment instrument at this time. Assessment of the co-curriculum has improved since the creation of the Student Affairs Assessment Coordinator position in 2010, but at this time, assessment is uneven across units within the co-curriculum. In addition, assessment data indicate that the development of critical thinking skills at Eastern could improve. A multi-year effort to implement Eastern's learning goals, including critical thinking, is underway and emphasizes increasing academic rigor and providing deliberate instruction on the undergraduate learning goals in general education courses.
- Although the academic leadership has ultimate authority over rigor and course standards, oversight generally resides at the department level, which may be inconsistent in practice. No process or Internal Governing Policy (IGP) addresses how to ensure continued rigor and accountability once a course has been approved by the curriculum councils. Although the university meets the core goals, a more robust program review would allow for greater oversight of the application and teaching of the undergraduate learning goals and would provide the university greater assurance of rigor throughout the curriculum. Discussions within colleges and departments about how to implement the university's newly updated syllabus policy, which encourages departments to develop review procedures for syllabi, may be a tool to foster increased rigor and accountability.
- Finally, the self-study uncovered a need for a more centralized, unified alumni survey, which led Eastern to design and plan a new alumni survey. The new survey will be disseminated in September 2014 to graduates one and three years' post-graduation.

Criterion 5 Resources, Planning, Institutional Effectiveness

The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

Strengths and Initiatives

- Despite financial threat, Eastern has maintained the fiscal, personnel, and infrastructure resources necessary to support its operations. Over the past several years, Eastern has moved from having a reserve deficit to having a reserve surplus sufficient to sustain university operations for up to ten weeks. Faculty and staff in all areas are qualified and well trained. Significant technology upgrades have been made over the past ten years and physical infrastructure has improved with the addition or renovation of facilities such as the Doudna Fine Arts Center, Textbook Rental, the Honors College addition, Blair Hall, and the Renewable Energy Center.
- Eastern plans on the basis of a sound, realistic understanding of its current capacity and probable future scenarios. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenues, such as enrollment, the economy, demographic shifts, and state support. Rolling forecasts have become a staple for administrative decision making. Automated deficit reports provide early warning reminders to financial managers and senior leadership that remediation steps have to be taken. Eastern's recent Program Analysis Review has resulted in a series of budget actions designed to reduce the university's expenses by 8% over the next two years.
- Eastern's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission. Eastern is led by a strong Board of Trustees with extensive knowledge of Eastern and its constituents. Faculty, staff, and student engaged governance is pervasive.
- Over the past ten years, Eastern has engaged in proactive, data- and mission-driven planning to improve performance. The Strategic Plan, Strategic Enrollment Plan, and Program Analysis are all examples of the systematic, active approach Eastern has taken to maintain and improve its operations. Eastern embraces transparency and data-driven decision making; a concerted effort has been made to make data—financial, recruitment, retention, assessment, and more—widely available to guide operations and decision making.

Challenges and Opportunities

- The two greatest challenges Eastern faces at this time are the decline in state revenue and decrease in student enrollment. State allocations are unlikely to increase in the near future, which means Eastern's reliance on tuition and fees will increase. To address the need for stronger enrollments, Eastern has developed the Strategic Enrollment Plan, designed to enhance recruitment, persistence, and completion. Eastern will also continue to explore alternative sources of funding, such as its recent highly successful Capital Campaign and performance-based funding.
- In addition, while Eastern has made great strides in both the transparency of its financial processes and in the pervasiveness of assessment, university budgeting decisions are still often not linked directly to assessment. The Provost's Award for Assessment and the First Choice Program at the graduate level serve as models for linking funding decisions to assessment of student learning, but these kinds of direct links between budgeting and assessment are not pervasive throughout campus.