Chadron State College
Handling Documents for HLC Assurance Argument
And Site Visit

I. Identifying Institutional Units Requiring Performance Documentation

Approximately four years before the HLC site visit (April, 2017), a campus task team consisting of representatives from every academic and nonacademic department was convened. The goal of this task team was to identify what performance documents/documentation already existed in each department. It was decided that the task team first needed to identify all of the entities on campus that contribute to student learning and enrichment. These entities were identified as Academic Affairs; Academic Teaching and Learning Technology; Affiliate Organizations; Athletics; Information Technology; Market Development; Marketing and College Relations; Physical Facilities, Budget, and Administration; and Student Services/Student Affairs. Each of these entities had sub-entities, but these were the major groups.

II. Identifying Existing and Missing Performance Documentation

The task team then worked on identifying what documents were produced by each entity and sub-entity. Many of the nonacademic entities did not produce any sort of performance evaluation documentation or even an annual report. The task team developed an Assessment Planning Worksheet that asked departments to indicate key responsibilities, changes that had occurred in the department within the last two years, internal strengths and weakness, external opportunities and threats, and departmental priorities.

Note: These early efforts to collect needed documentation did create a pool of evidence for the Assurance Argument and site visit. However, as the preparation process progressed, the campus continually identified documents/information to be added or updated. More information about the organizational aspect of CSC's preparation for the Assurance Argument and the site visit is available on the college's reaffirmation process website.

III. Problems with the First Attempt at Storing and Naming the Documents

Document Storage   As the evidence gathering process began, the Assessment Planning Worksheets and other documents were sent to one person who was responsible for the collection, naming, and storage of all the documents that might be useful to the writer of the Assurance Argument and others working on the reaffirmation efforts. That person, known as the "Gatekeeper," was the CSC Technical Services Librarian. The Gatekeeper initially stored documents on an external hard drive. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year, all documents were copied to a flash (USB) drive and given to two of the academic deans. They reviewed each document, sorted them by organizational entity, and organized them under the relevant Assurance Argument criteria.

Soon, several issues emerged that resulted in changes to the initial storage system. First, a better backup system was needed. Second, use of the documents by the reaccreditation team was hindered by restricted access to the external drive, and information on flash drives could not be

readily updated with the materials being gathered and added. Third, locating documents organized under the Assurance Argument criteria was problematic, particularly for the Assurance Argument lead writer, because evidence is often used under more than one criterion. Early in the process, the deans were not immersed enough in the writing of the Argument to determine in advance where the evidence would go.

Filenames   Initially, the Gatekeeper developed a coding system for filenames so documents could be identified by entity, sub-entity, and type of document. For example, documents for the Physical Facilities, Budget, and Administration (PFBA) unit used the following prefixes:

> PFBA_AF – Administration & Finance
> PFBA_BO – Business Office
> PFBA_C – Custodians
> PFBA_HR – Human Resources
> PFBA_M – Mailroom
> PFBA_Mt – Maintenance
> > PFBA_MtCon – Construction
> > PFBA_MtGr – Grounds
> > PFBA_MtMt -- Maintenance
> PFBA_SS – Safety and Security

Under this system, an Assessment Planning Report from Grounds would be named "PFBA_MtGr_APW13-14.doc."

This naming method is standard procedure for a librarian. However, members of the campus HLC reaffirmation team did not find it user-friendly, particularly with respect to quickly identifying content. Also, there were concerns about creating difficulties for the peer reviewers.

IV. Refined (Final) Method for Storing and Naming the Documents

Backup and Access   Concerned about document backup, the Information Technology Department insisted that a better document storage system be implemented during the second year of the document collection process. SharePoint would be used as the primary storage system, and the external drive would be the secondary system. SharePoint is a web-based document storage and management system with a guaranteed backup process. The Gatekeeper transferred documents from the external drive and organized them in SharePoint. Members of the reaffirmation team could then be granted reading access to SharePoint, which contained all the updated and newly added documents.

Organization   SharePoint works best with either a one- or two-level file organization. Therefore, first-level folders were based on topic; then if necessary, the second-level folders were labeled by year. For example, documents pertaining to assessment of the Essential Studies Program (core curriculum) were filed under the level-one topic, "Assessment of Essential Studies." Second-level folders were created and labeled for each year the data were collected.

The level-one folder names used were: Academic Degree Program Additions and Deletions; Assessment of Co-Curricular Programs; Assessment of Essential Studies; Assessment of General Studies; Assessment of Graduate Programs; Assessment of Non-Academic Units; Assessment of Undergraduate Degree Programs; Assumed Practices; Assurance Argument Documents; Athletics; Catalogs; Coordination Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) Program Reviews; Course Syllabi; Federal Compliance; Handbooks; HLC Academy for Assessment of Student Learning; National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE); Quality Assurance; State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA); Teaching Faculty Qualifications; and Transfer Agreements.

These topical folders allowed members of the HLC reaffirmation team, particularly the Assurance Argument writer, to locate needed evidence more easily. Campus administrators could also identify missing assessment reports for a given year and try to locate that information well before the site visit.

Filenames Initially, documents on the external drive were transferred to SharePoint with the original filenames. However, a consultant brought in early in the Assurance Argument writing process suggested that document names should make the content of the document more easily recognizable to campus constituents and to HLC peer reviewers. Accordingly (with input from the Assurance Argument writer), document names were constructed using (in this order): the issuing body, the topic of the document, a sub-topic (as necessary), and a date (if needed).

Examples of the more descriptive evidence document names include:

CSC_Course_Challange_Criteria.pdf
CSC_High_Impact_Creative_No_Holds_Bard.pdf
CSC_Syllabus_FCS448-448L-0089_KMadsen_Spring2017.pdf
NSCS_BdM_012015_Rangeland_Lab.pdf

V. Adding Evidence Documents to the Assurance System

The lead writer and researcher for the Assurance Argument created documents to be used as evidence in the Argument and sent them to the Gatekeeper. Although evidence was often drawn from SharePoint, the writer or researcher needed to reformat the information. Most documents had a coversheet, which included a title, the relevant time period covered, and a brief explanation of the document. The Gatekeeper merged the evidence document and coversheet into one PDF document. Occasionally, when a document consisted of a self-explanatory screenshot, the writer omitted the coversheet and added a descriptive title on the first page along with the source URL. The Gatekeeper then saved the formatted documents to SharePoint and to the external drive before adding them to the Assurance System. Thus, a record of the documents as they were formatted and used in the Argument was stored in two places. In the Assurance System, the Gatekeeper organized documents in folders created for each criterion. Finally, the lead writer linked the documents to the appropriate places in the Assurance Argument narrative.

VI. Freezing the College Website

Screenshots of various webpages on the college website were used as evidence to demonstrate that CSC publicizes its mission and other important information. News stories from the website were also used to document co-curricular activities, college outreach efforts, recognition of achievement, etc. Because screenshots and URLs on documents had to match information on the source website at the time of the peer review, all CSC webpages were frozen four months before the Assurance Argument was to be locked. This freeze lasted until two weeks after the site visit. Campus departments were notified well before the freeze and given several months to update their webpages. During the freeze, all requests for essential updates were submitted to the Gatekeeper for approval. Since the Gatekeeper had knowledge of the documents in the Assurance Argument, this was a fairly easy process.

VII. Final Check of Assurance Argument Evidence Documents

Changes to the college website (and other source websites) did require a final check of every URL in every document in the Assurance Argument. Also, documents with screenshots were checked against current webpages to make sure updates had not been overlooked. This process led to standardizing the look of documents (font type, font size, color), adding or correcting information on coversheets, and updating screenshots as necessary. To complete the review of the Assurance Argument evidence, every link was checked to verify that the correct document would be brought up during the peer review. The HLC reaffirmation team recognized the importance of completing the Assurance Argument at least one month before the System lockdown in order to complete this review process.

VIII. Site Visit

The system did prove to be an effective way to store documents requested by the HLC peer reviewers both immediately prior to and during the site visit. Initially, the HLC reaffirmation team planned to open the SharePoint site to the reviewers to access as they wished. However, potential difficulties in navigating the system convinced the team that it would be more efficient for the Gatekeeper to retrieve documents. For example, while the Assurance Argument contained evidence pertaining to activities such as academic assessment, sometimes the peer reviewers wanted to see additional examples from different departments. The Gatekeeper could readily access the requested information from SharePoint and provide it to the peer reviewers in a timely manner.