Because the committee is examining the big picture about student surveys in its charge to look at SPOT, I thought this resource from the IDEA Center might be of interest. This paper examines ways universities have used information from end-of-term student surveys in their course, program, and institutional evaluations, and the discussion in this particular paper concerns ways universities have used the IDEA survey to address various of the SACS Standards. (The IDEA Center site has links to similar documents related to other regional accreditors.) I've typed in the URL for this resource at the top of the first page of the document (concatenated to this page).

Note that the IDEA Center is careful to distinguish between direct and indirect measures, realizing that any student survey data about student perceptions of what they learned are *not* direct evidence. However, what *can* be learned from indirect measures is valuable, and this resource shows ways that some SACS institutions have used the data generated by the IDEA student surveys to meet SACS accreditation standards, to inform their QEPs, etc.

Whether from IDEA or some other survey, this resource provides some good insights about using student survey data. As we consider potential revisions to SPOT, the idea of how we use the data generated must factor into decisions about what questions should be on the survey — that's why I thought this resource might be useful.

Thanks,
Jeff

The Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and The IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction System

Insight.Improvement.Impact.®

The Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools ("The Commission on Colleges"), has increased its focus on student learning as a core indicator.

> "The Principles of Accreditation attest to the commitment of the Commission on Colleges to the enhancement of the quality of higher education and to the proposition that student learning is at the heart of the mission of all institutions of higher learning."
> – Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (p. 21, 2005). Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (www.sacscoc.org/pdf2008PrinciplesofAccreditation.pdf)

A clear nexus exists between The IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction System and the Commission on Colleges' position on student learning. Measurable student learning is a component of a number of Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards (Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, 2008).

From its inception in 1975, The IDEA Center's student ratings instrument (referred to as "IDEA" throughout this document) has served as a valuable tool to assess student learning and to guide teaching improvement. IDEA uses self-report of student learning on specific course objectives as its primary measure of teaching effectiveness. Therefore, data collected from the system is uniquely suited to aggregate across courses to indicate student learning at the course, curriculum, program, and institution levels.

While originally developed to focus on the effectiveness of individual instructors, IDEA's emphasis on specific student learning outcomes makes it a highly useful tool for assessing programs or groups of courses as well. When combining data across courses, the focus of the question is changed from "How am I doing and what might I do to improve?" to "How are we doing in supporting student learning and what might we do to improve?"

IDEA and Student Learning
Every institution must tailor an accreditation plan to suit its culture, climate, and situation. The Commission on Colleges does not prescribe the plan, but rather attempts to ensure quality and stimulate improvement by helping the institution through a self-study process.

This self-study process is guided by a set of Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards that establish a level of accountability an institution must meet for accreditation. IDEA is well-suited to help institutions establish this level of accountability through reporting and reflection on individual, programmatic, and institutional progress.

IDEA is not prescriptive, but rather is intended to facilitate creative thinking about how results can be used to support improvement processes as well as document institutional excellence.

Unique Features of IDEA
IDEA is uniquely appropriate to address The Commission on Colleges' Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards that are focused on student learning. It allows an institution to easily use results for programmatic assessment and accreditation purposes with a number of exclusive features:

Focus on Student Learning
The student learning model, that *specific teaching methods influence certain types of student progress (learning), under certain circumstances,* was used as the foundation for the IDEA student survey.

The core of IDEA is the focus on student ratings of progress on specific objectives. Research has shown there is no single, correct way to teach. As a result, IDEA tailors each report to fit the instructor's selected learning objectives and offers recommendations for improvement based on our extensive national database of comparable instructional situations.

Faculty Establishment of Course Objectives
The IDEA Faculty Information Form allows faculty to rate the importance of 12 learning objectives as "essential," "important," or "of minor or no importance." Because the purpose of each course is different, IDEA allows instructors the opportunity to define their expectations for each course by identifying which of the 12 possible learning objectives are relevant (important or essential) to their courses. The process of selecting course objectives is often collaborative, with faculty as a group taking ownership of curricular goals by reviewing each course's purposes as they contribute to a coherent curriculum.

The IDEA Faculty Information Form is frequently used not only to facilitate individual reflection, but also to spark collaborative conversations across a department about student learning expectations, institutional goals, and how individual courses contribute to student achievement. Factors related to teaching methods, learning environments, learning outcomes, and student characteristics that impact learning are all considered from a faculty perspective.

Comparative Data

The accreditation process is often helped by access to useful benchmarking data. With more than 160,000 classes processed annually, IDEA provides solid national benchmark data for individual instructors, programs, departments, and institutions. While the confidentiality of individual institutions' results is strictly maintained, IDEA's database of information about similar groups of classes is a vital tool for comparative decision making.

Group Summary Reports and Aggregate Data Files

While student feedback can directly guide the personal reflection and improvement of individuals, the richness of the aggregated data is also a powerful information source. It can guide systematic assessment and improvement of academic programs. By better understanding the relationship of teaching methods to learning outcomes, targeted improvement processes can be pursued. Because of the richness of the survey items, IDEA results can be used to address a number of Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards.

Groups of courses (e.g., sections of one course, courses that comprise a program, institutional summaries) are analyzed for accreditation purposes. Group Summary Reports serve as a "snapshot" of institutional status. Ongoing use allows monitoring of progress over time.

Aggregate Data Files provide complete course results in an Excel spreadsheet, allowing institutions to conduct customized research on their own data. A campus may analyze results to address specific, unique institutional questions and prepare custom reports to respond to self-study or Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) processes.

Institutional Use of Results

Systematic, regular monitoring of results through the Group Summary Reports and Aggregate Data Files, combined with reflection and use of information, can result in measurable improvements in student learning. Institutions can align their use of IDEA with their particular program goals for student achievement, and can chart improvements resulting from analysis of results, supporting faculty collaboration toward greater overall effectiveness.

Involving the Campus: Angelo State University (Texas)

Angelo State University has used the IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction system since the fall 2000 term. The Group Summary Reports (GSRs) are used to facilitate campus-wide involvement in the discussion of student learning, teaching effectiveness, and internal questions related to accreditation. Results provide:

- insight related to students' perceived learning on course objectives and efficacy of instructors' teaching methods
- evidence for review and improvement of the core curriculum and academic programs, and
- information to guide faculty development

The Provost reviews the university- and college-wide reports and compares results from multiple years. The Deans review the college and department results. To further facilitate campus involvement, university, college, and department results for the excellence of teacher, excellence of course, and progress on learning are provided on an internal network drive. Academic departments meet to compare their current ratings to the IDEA external benchmark, former department ratings, and current college ratings. Some of the questions addressed include:

- In what ways are the comparisons meaningful?
- In what areas are strengths indicated?
- In what areas are results lower than expected?
- In what areas do we prioritize our improvement efforts?

In addition, IDEA is used creatively within academic programs to facilitate faculty conversations about intended learning outcomes. Faculty teaching the same course discuss which of the 12 IDEA objectives to include in the course syllabi. Faculty with highly structured curricula determine which objectives are appropriate for each course and how objectives differ for upper- and lower-level courses so that students receive a well rounded educational experience.

The Commission on Colleges' Core Requirements and IDEA

Institutions must address a set of Commission on Colleges Core Requirements that represent best practices and establish levels of accomplishment. What follows is a brief discussion of the relationship between IDEA's emphasis on student learning and specific Commission on Colleges Core Requirements that also address student learning.

Core Requirements are basic, broad-based, foundational requirements that an institution must meet to be accredited with the Commission on Colleges. They establish a threshold of development required of an institution seeking initial or continued accreditation by the Commission and reflect the Commission's basic expectations of candidate and member institutions. – Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (p. 15, 2008). Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Core Requirement 2.5 (Institutional Effectiveness)
The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission. – Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (p. 16, 2008). Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

The purpose of this Core Requirement is to ensure that the institution's approach to effectiveness is appropriate. To be considered appropriate, an ongoing planning and evaluation process must have at its heart a commitment to continuous improvement. There are many ways to address this Core Requirement and many systems and processes can and should be employed to demonstrate an institution is fulfilling its mission.

The ongoing use of IDEA Group Summary Reports and Aggregate Data Files to evaluate teaching effectiveness and student learning, and to facilitate improved teaching and learning, addresses Core Requirement 2.5. Group Summary Reports allow identification of areas of excellence and challenge. For example, longitudinal data from IDEA can be used to identify where improvements are needed, where improvement has been achieved in areas of concern, and where expectations are being met related to student learning, overall effectiveness, use of teaching methods/strategies, and student attitudes.

The IDEA Center also has products that assess the effectiveness of key administrators. These products can be used as part of an ongoing improvement process. Please visit www.theideacenter.org for more information.

Core Requirement 2.12 (Quality Enhancement Plan)
The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that (1) includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. – Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (p. 19, 2008). Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

2.12 (1) Identifying Key Issues
IDEA can be used along with other sources of information to identify key issues relevant to student learning. IDEA provides input from the students' perspectives about their course experiences. This feedback can expand upon or confirm results from other key indicators collected by the institution.

2.12 (2) Student Learning Outcomes
IDEA serves as a component of the QEP by facilitating inquiry into student learning achievements and challenges. This inquiry may identify specific course objectives that need improvement.
- Are our course emphases consistent with our stated curricular purposes?
- When a learning objective is selected as essential or important, does student self-report of learning meet our expectations?
- Do our courses' overall student progress ratings compare favorably to courses at other institutions?

2.12 (2) Learning Environment
Both faculty and students reflect on a number of learning environment factors. For example, faculty document the mode of delivery, the impact of student characteristics on learning, and other circumstances as well. Based on student feedback, IDEA also provides potential improvement strategies by identifying teaching methods that may improve student learning on specific objectives if they were to be employed more frequently.
- How do our students' work habits and motivation compare to those of students at other institutions?
- How do students perceive work demands and difficulty of the course?
- Which primary and secondary instructional modes do instructors employ?
- Which teaching methods do instructors utilize effectively?
- What are faculty perceptions of the impact of various circumstances on learning?

2.12 (3) Institutional Capability for the Initiation, Implementation, and Completion of the QEP and *2.12 (4) Broad-Based Involvement of Institutional Constituencies*
IDEA serves as a data reference point to involve constituencies and focus the initiatives of stakeholders. IDEA provides shared tools and a shared language to develop a shared vision for improvement.

2.12 (5) Process for Assessing Achievement
An important component of the QEP is an evaluation strategy to measure the effectiveness of improvement efforts. Because IDEA is typically administered systematically across courses that may be the focus of the QEP, the aggregated results can be disseminated and reviewed by key constituents as part of the ongoing process. Tracking results longitudinally can provide insight into possible improvements and changes resulting from the QEP process. Specifically, IDEA can serve to determine whether goals for improvements in student learning and enhancements to the learning environment have been met.

Using IDEA to Identify Key Issues: Tennessee Technological University (Tennessee)

IDEA was one source of existing research and assessment data used by Tennessee Technological University (TTU) to guide the development of their 2008 Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), *Improving Students' Critical Thinking/Real-World Problem Solving Skills Through the Use of Active Learning Strategies.* A review of IDEA results revealed how frequently faculty selected various objectives as important or essential to their courses. TTU discovered that while faculty frequently identified basic cognitive background (e.g., factual knowledge; principles/theories) as being central to their courses, they infrequently selected other important aspects of the QEP (e.g., critical thinking for problem solving and decision making; teamwork; finding and using resources). Historical IDEA data allowed them to establish a baseline emphasis of their learning objectives over the previous five-year period, and to establish measureable QEP targets for each year. Specifically, the five-year goal was to see an annual five-percent increase in the number of courses emphasizing the IDEA objectives that were critical to the QEP topic. IDEA provided a familiar and common mechanism to communicate and gain faculty commitment to focus on skills relevant to the QEP in their courses.

The Commission on Colleges' Comprehensive Standards and IDEA

Institutions must address a set of Commission on Colleges Comprehensive Standards that describe ideals in institutional practice. What follows is a brief discussion of the relationship between IDEA's emphasis on student learning and specific Commission on Colleges Comprehensive Standards that address educational outcomes and student learning.

The Comprehensive Standards set forth requirements in the following four areas: (1) institutional mission, governance, and effectiveness; (2) programs; (3) resources; and 4) institutional responsibility for Commission policies. The Comprehensive Standards are more specific to the operations of the institution, represent good practice in higher education, and establish a level of accomplishment expected of all member institutions. – Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (p. 23, 2008). Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Comprehensive Standard 3.3 (Institutional Effectiveness)
The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas:

3.3.1.1. Educational programs, to include student learning outcomes.

Comprehensive Standard 3.5 (Educational Programs: Undergraduate Programs)

3.5.1. The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which graduates have attained them.

Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1.1 and 3.5.1 require that outcomes be identified and then assessed. Although IDEA is used to evaluate faculty effectiveness and guide individual reflection and improvement, the results also can be used in an aggregate fashion to evaluate learning at the program level. The 12 IDEA learning objectives are likely to align with many of the specific student learning outcomes of the educational programs and the general education competencies at your institution.

Consistent with standards 3.3 and 3.5, IDEA requires that essential and important course objectives be identified through the completion of the Faculty Information Form for each course. In the IDEA System, objectives selected for courses in a program are typically determined by either the individual faculty member teaching the course or by a committee of faculty members responsible for the curriculum. Many campuses have found that the process of selecting IDEA goals is highly useful in meeting expectations of these and other Comprehensive Standards and Core Requirements.

The Group Summary Report may be used to address questions such as:
- Are our course emphases consistent with our stated curricular or general educational purposes?

- When a learning objective is selected as "essential" or "important," does student self-report of learning meet our expectations?
- Do our courses' overall student progress ratings compare favorably to courses at other institutions?

Comprehensive Standard 3.7 (Faculty)

3.7.1. The institution employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution. When determining acceptable qualifications of its faculty, an institution gives primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline in accordance with the guidelines listed below. The institution also considers competence, effectiveness, and capacity, including, as appropriate, undergraduate and graduate degrees, related work experiences in the field, professional licensure and certifications, honors and awards, continuous documented excellence in teaching, or other demonstrated competencies and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes. For all cases, the institution is responsible for justifying and documenting the qualifications of its faculty.

3.7.2. The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status. (Faculty evaluation)

3.7.3. The institution provides ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners. (Faculty development)

A description of the systematic implementation of IDEA can show compliance with the Faculty Comprehensive Standards. The use of IDEA shows a commitment to "documented excellence in teaching" and verifies "demonstrated competencies (teaching methods/styles) and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes."

IDEA answers two basic questions that faculty might ask concerning the effectiveness of their teaching at the conclusion of a course:
- How did I do?
- What might I do to improve?

With IDEA, teaching effectiveness is determined by the self-report of student progress on goals chosen by the instructor. Research based on our large national database also allows IDEA to provide diagnostic assistance for those with disappointing results. IDEA provides feedback and resources (e.g., IDEA Papers, POD-IDEA Notes on Instruction and Learning) for continuous personal and collaborative improvement. An institution's investment in the IDEA System demonstrates a commitment to faculty members' professional growth and improvement.

IDEA's Group Summary Report helps address some questions that might be raised by these comprehensive standards:
- Which teaching methods might we employ more effectively to better support student learning?
- Do our courses' overall student progress ratings compare favorably to courses at other institutions?

Standards Compliance: Flagler College (Florida)

IDEA was an important component of Flagler College's documentation of SACS accreditation standards in three areas.

1. (3.3.1.1) *Institutional Effectiveness: Educational programs, to include student learning outcomes.*

   Flagler College included IDEA as one of the educational effectiveness measures that focused on their two basic questions:
   - What should students know and be able to do as a result of completing a particular major or minor?
   - What should students know and be able to do as a result of completing this course?

   At the course level, they were able to demonstrate how IDEA is used by instructors to focus their course content and teaching strategies to enhance student learning through:
   - Faculty reflection about course-specific learning
   - Explicit and consistent inclusion of IDEA learning objectives on each course syllabus
   - Student self-assessment of learning to continuously improve teaching and learning

At the programmatic level, Flagler College faculty discussed how Group Summary Reports provide documentation of discipline and department-wide success as well as possible areas for improvement. The group results were used to focus professional development within departments.

2. (3.5.1) *College level competencies*
   Flagler College utilized IDEA's flexibility to add up to 20 additional questions to craft specific questions related to their seven goals. As they described student attainment of each goal, one of the sources of evidence was student responses to the specific questions included in the IDEA survey process.

3. (3.7.2) *Faculty evaluation*
   Flagler College described their use of the IDEA as one component of their process to evaluate teaching effectiveness. They included their history of IDEA use, their rationale for selecting IDEA, and their process for reviewing individual reports. They also discussed the availability of training for faculty to interpret reports and included sample summary results for four faculty members in their supporting documentation.

The IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction System is unique in that it serves numerous purposes—formative and summative feedback at both the individual and program levels. Conducting surveys is a time consuming process and achieving high response rates has become increasingly difficult. IDEA eliminates the need to conduct additional surveys. And, since student ratings surveys typically yield high response rates, the data obtained are more representative and reliable than other surveys. IDEA is a cost-effective solution to serving your multiple information needs, supporting improvement processes as well as documenting institutional excellence.

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