September 4, 2014

Dear Campus Community,

In a conversation with one of us last week, a department chair noted that filling out the USAP form would be easier than preparing the annual report, but that the work that would precede filling out the form would be harder. Yes, this is correct: previously, the annual report involved describing how activities that units had already done fit with the university’s overall goals and direction. The goal of USAP is to change the direction of the university from retrospective reporting to prospective planning, so that units can move more purposefully toward the goals set out in the 2014-2020 Strategic Plan.

As mentioned in our e-mail from last week, members of the USAP Team will be scheduling meetings with each department and/or unit; these will take place in October. The purpose of these meetings will be to discuss the actual reporting process and how it applies specifically to your department and unit. (Note to department chairs and unit heads: Because there are over 125 units, we’ve created a list combining multiple units that could meet together. The color-coded listing is attached for review so if you prefer something different, please let us know. Joleen Downs, USAP Secretary will be contacting you in the next few days to schedule. To support a collaborative process, we ask you to encourage the whole unit to participate.)

Before you can report on goals, your unit will need to set them. This is the hard part. You can begin this process now.

Getting started:

1. All members of a unit or department should read both the Strategic Plan and the Plan 2020 Outcome Measures (which offer specific goals and metrics for the four major goals of the Strategic Plan).

2. Consider the following questions:
   
   - What initiatives have you already undertaken that address one or more of these goals? If you have already begun a process to “close the assessment loop” to use assessment data to improve your operations, there’s no need to scrap that and start from scratch. Clarify your process and outcomes, and include that as one of your goals.
   - What are some gaps in your operations that need to be addressed before another goal can be set? For example, one of the 2020 Outcomes under “Promote the Creation, Integration, and Application of Knowledge” is “100% of faculty with research assignment meet departmental expectations.” If you are an academic department that does not have clear departmental research expectations for post-tenure faculty members, then you are not yet at a place where you can address this outcome goal, and thus a reasonable first-year goal would be to clarify your departmental expectation.
   - Do you want to develop any new initiatives that would both fit with your unit’s mission and align with the Strategic Plan?
   - Does your department or unit devote significant time or resources to projects that are not central to the mission of your unit or the university? If so, consider creating a plan
to redirect your unit’s energy toward activities in alignment with your own mission and the Strategic Plan of the university.

3. Discuss together, thoughtfully and reflectively, what goals to set for your unit. If there is more than one important sub-unit within your unit (such as graduate and undergraduate programs within academic departments), aim to create distinct goals for sub-units. As noted on the report template, all units that are directly responsible for student learning, both academic and support services, should include a goal for either I.A.1 (“Improve quality and fidelity of assessment processes of degree/certificate programs, General Education program, and Baccalaureate Framework with dedicated resources”) or I.A.2 (“Use assessment data to improve student learning”). Our reason for requiring this focused attention on improving measurement of student learning is that deficits in this area were the principal problem identified by the Higher Learning Commission in our most recent accreditation.

There is no set number of goals that each unit is expected to produce; choose a number, and choose goals, that feel appropriate to your unit’s situation and that seem like a sustainable part of your ongoing workload. The USAP Task Force, in reading the goal-setting reports this academic year, will determine what goals and outcomes of the Strategic Plan may be falling between the cracks and would then encourage special attention to those goals starting next year. But for this first year, the change we are aiming at is the shift from looking backward at the previous year’s accomplishments to looking forward to goals for the future.

If you have more questions about the process, there are three ways to get answers:

1. Ask a member of the USAP Task Force or the USAP Facilitation Team (a list of all members can be found at http://www.ipfw.edu/microsites/usap/Meet_the_Team/).
2. Plan to attend the town hall meeting on Friday, September 19, from 10-11 am in KT G46.
3. Attend the meeting for your own department or unit that will be scheduled for October.

Thank you for reading this whole message all the way to here.

Drafted by Rachel Hile (Co-Chair) for the USAP Team (http://www.ipfw.edu/microsites/usap/Meet_the_Team/).