

Audit Task Force meeting notes

November 10, 2005

Recorded by Rick Swanson, Dean of Instruction, Sandhills Community College

Members present:

L. Steve Thornburg, Audit Task Force convener, President, Cleveland CC

Lynne Bunch, representative of Presidents, College of the Albemarle

Mary Rittling, representative of Presidents, Davidson County CC

Janet Chernega, representative of Instructional Administrators, Central Piedmont CC

Michael Germano, representative of Instructional Administrators, Haywood CC

Rick Swanson, representative of Instructional Administrators, Sandhills CC

Calvin Dull, representative of Continuing Education Administrators, Wilkes CC

Sharon McGinnis, representative of Continuing Education Administrators, Coastal
Carolina CC

Molly Parkhill, representative of Continuing Education Administrators, Blue Ridge CC

Brad Burch, representative of Registrars, Guilford TCC

Barbara Boyce, System Office representative

Keith Brown, System Office representative

Edith Lang, System Office representative

Also present: Fred Williams, NCCCS Executive Vice President

Member excused: Ken Boham, representative of Presidents, Caldwell CC&TI

Meeting notes:

Steve Thornburg began the meeting at 10:10 AM with an introduction and overview of the formation of this task force and outlined the purpose of the meeting, which is to discuss the purpose and objectives of the task force, future meeting dates, and how to proceed. He mentioned the white paper prepared by the association of instructional administrators on the "NCCCS Program Auditing Function," a copy of which is attached.

Fred Williams, NCCCS Executive Vice President, provided an overview of the auditing process and reported on an ongoing effort at the system office to review the process for establishing, defining, and communicating system office policies and guidelines.

An open discussion followed. Members affirmed the importance of the auditing function to the community college system, the state board, and the legislature. The group also agreed that policies and guidelines followed by the auditors should be clear and unambiguous. They should identify criteria to be met by colleges to satisfy legislative and state board requirements while providing for appropriate flexibility at the local level for colleges to maintain and enhance the quality of their academic programs.

The group identified two primary areas for which the task force would provide input:

1. Policy and guidelines process issues. The task force will monitor the ongoing effort at the system office to review the process for establishing, defining, and communicating system office policies and guidelines. Members will share information with their respective associations and constituents and provide feedback for improving the process.
2. System office guidelines. The task force will review existing policies and guidelines, evaluate the need for new guidance relating to the auditing function, and provide recommendations to the system office. Members will facilitate obtaining information and assistance from their respective associations as appropriate.

Task force members suggested that the next meeting be after the spring 2006 association meetings, perhaps in late May 2006. The meeting was adjourned at about 12:00 noon.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard E. Swanson, Ph.D.
Dean of Instruction
Sandhills Community College

White Paper: NCCCS Program Auditing Function (Prepared by the NCACCIA, January 2005)

Introduction

During the past year, the NCCCS Chief Academic Officers have held several discussions about Program Audits. From these conversations have emerged several concerns and questions that lead us to seek clarification of the authority and scope of the Program Auditing function in the NCCCS, especially as it relates to program content and quality.

Among the concerns that have emerged are the following:

- A lack of understanding of the auditors' role in reviewing program quality and course content
- A perception that the interpretation and application of NCCCS policy is inconsistent
- A perception that the distinction between "guidelines" and "policies" is unclear in the auditing process
- Questions about the use of numbered memoranda as "policy" against which colleges are audited
- General confusion about the numbered memoranda system, i.e., multiple memoranda exist to clarify a single policy or another memorandum; the numbered memoranda database is not fully searchable; policy-related memoranda are not distinguished from informational memoranda
- A perception that auditors have a tendency to create audit standards by defining certain forms as acceptable documentation
- An apparent disconnect between audit requirements and the capabilities of the information management system
- A perception of program auditing as an increasingly intrusive process which disrupts classes
- A concern that auditing practices appear to call into question the professional integrity of community college faculty and administrators
- General confusion about the legal authorization of the Program Auditing function and the scope of the auditing process in the NCCCS.

More to the point, the Chief Academic Officers are concerned about what we perceive to be a growing auditing focus on matters of program content, quality, and effectiveness.

Program Content, Quality, and Effectiveness

The Commission on Colleges Principles of Accreditation, adopted in December 2003, places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of an institution's educational program with its faculty and

administration. Every college is expected to employ “qualified administrative and academic officers with the experience, competence, and capacity to lead the institution” (3.2.8) and to employ qualified faculty who have responsibility and authority in academic and governance matters (3.7.5).

Institutional accreditation is based upon a thorough internal review and evaluation of college policies, programs, procedures, and services, followed by a rigorous external review of all aspects of the college conducted by professional educators from peer institutions. An accredited institution has demonstrated that it has an effective governance process that includes a governing board, a chief executive officer, and an administration and faculty who are qualified to govern, administer, and lead the institution. The accredited institution has also established effective policies and procedures related to governance, planning and evaluation, academic programs including distance education, faculty qualifications, student support services, continuing education, and facilities and other resources. The accreditation process is based largely on the assumption that the administration and faculty are responsible for the development, implementation, and monitoring of academic programs and policies.

Further, an institution that is accredited by the Commission on Colleges has met an expectation of integrity that is stated in the Principles of Accreditation: Integrity . . . is a relationship in which all parties agree to deal honestly and openly with their constituencies and with one another. Without this commitment, no relationship can exist or be sustained between the Commission and its member institutions. The Commission’s requirements, policies, processes, procedures, and decisions are predicated on integrity. (p. 5)

Because of the Commission’s expectation that an institution’s faculty and administration have primary responsibility for developing, implementing, and monitoring educational programs and policies and the Commission’s assumption that accredited institutions are operated with integrity, it is our position that the NCCCS auditing function should not and need not focus on matters of program content, quality, and effectiveness.

Recommendation

The Chief Academic Officers realize that the State Board of Community Colleges has the responsibility to enact policies and to ensure that these policies are being met. We also recognize the imperative of ensuring accurate reporting of enrollment data so that the System’s funding mechanism operates fairly. To that end, we suggest that the roles of the NCCCS Auditors should focus on (1) a review of the policies that the SBCC requires institutions to have and (2) a review of enrollment data to ensure that they are reported accurately for funding purposes. Further, a distinction should be drawn so that findings related to

policies should not result in financial penalties, while findings related to administrative errors in reporting enrollment data should continue to result in financial penalties. This distinction will serve to strengthen the institution's adherence to state policies while distinguishing between those that impact the use of state funds and those that do not.

The Chief Academic Officers perceive a need for a policy statement that clarifies the scope and function of the Program Auditing process. To that end, we recommend to the Presidents Association the following actions:

- (1) Formulate and propose a policy statement that defines the Program Auditing scope and function.
- (2) Initiate the appointment of an ad hoc committee of auditors, System Office staff, presidents, chief academic officers, chief student services officers, and chief continuing education officers to delineate and define program audit procedures.
- (3) Review, revise as needed, and endorse the work of the ad hoc committee.

For recommended action (1), we propose that the Presidents Association use the following statement as an initial draft:

Community Colleges in the North Carolina Community College System are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in accordance with the Commission on Colleges Principles of Accreditation. The Principles of Accreditation, adopted in December 2003, place primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of an institution's educational program with its faculty and administration. Institutional accreditation is based upon a thorough internal review and evaluation of college policies, programs, procedures, and services, followed by a rigorous external review of all aspects of the college conducted by professional educators from peer institutions.

In keeping with the Commission on Colleges Principles of Accreditation, the responsibility and authority for matters of program content, quality, and effectiveness reside with college faculty and administration. Such matters lie at the core of an institution's academic freedom and academic integrity. They are appropriately reviewed and evaluated through the accreditation process and should not be the focus of the NCCCS auditing function.

The NCCCS auditing function should focus on the ensuring that community colleges adhere to policies established by the State Board of Community Colleges and that college enrollment data is accurately reported so that the NCCCS funding mechanism operates fairly.