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ACADEMIC AUDIT

It is important that institutions of higher education engage in activities that advance both accountability and improvement. The Academic Audit is an approach that can accomplish both. The Academic Audit has been adopted by higher education institutions in Australia, China, New Zealand, Sweden, and England. The Tennessee Board of Regents is using the Audit in its Academic Audit Pilot Project to explore if the process will provide the significant improvement and accountability that its stakeholders require. It is significant for Tennessee because the TBR System is one of only two higher education systems in the United States to explore this method. In addition, this project is unique in that TBR community colleges are the only community colleges in the world participating in the Academic Audit. Dr. William Massy of the Jackson Hole Group, a widely respected expert and pioneer in the development of Academic Audit, is providing assistance in the pilot. Currently, 35 academic programs are participating. Over 120 faculty and administrators will be trained as auditors in February and site visits will take place in March and April. The project will be completed by the end of the spring semester. This Academic Brief provides an overview of the Audit benefits as well as participant perceptions of the impact of the Audit process.



*Paula Myrick Short, Ph.D.
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs*

BENEFITS OF ACADEMIC AUDIT

Understanding the benefits of Academic Audit is as easy as ABC

Accountability – The goal of Academic Audit is **Continuous Quality Improvement**. To accomplish that, faculty, administrators, and staff engage in on-going self-assessment, group assessment, and peer review to achieve Education Quality Process Maturity. Through adherence to standards of Best Practice, they analyze, compare, and monitor their progress. The audit also asks how faculty work collegially toward improvement in teaching and learning. Above all, problems are solved through this process-guided, outcome-centered approach to quality management in higher education.

Boosts Morale – As a Faculty-Driven management model, Academic Audit promotes Teamwork: collaboration, cooperation, coherence, consensus, and collegiality. The process encourages full participation by engaging all members as stakeholders. Everyone shares the blame and the credit, and no one is off the hook by saying, “It’s not my job.” The process is forgiving in the sense that there is the freedom to succeed or fail without fear of penalty (e.g. low annual evaluations scores), and it promotes flexibility by giving all ideas a chance to be heard and tested. Validated workers produce value-added work.

Cost Effective – Academic Audit focuses on making improvements in institutions without budget increases or outside resources. Through **Focused Reflection** (i.e. self-assessment) faculty, staff, and administrators identify ways to improve with special attention to low-hanging fruit. Ultimately, high morale creates enthusiastic workers that work harder, take fewer sick days, volunteer for extra tasks, and avoid wasting time. It all adds up to more cost effective use of higher education dollars and a more efficient work force - the human dividend. Most of all, students receive a quality educational experience.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY

ETSU – Dr. Cynthia Sue Burnley – “The audit process provided focus to issues that had previously only been informal conversations among faculty. Some issues were resolved because of the audit process, which encouraged faculty to engage in deeper, more sustained conversations.”



MTSU – Dr. William Badley – “My impressions are that the Academic Audit has provided new avenues for dialog among faculty, faculty and chairs, and faculty and administration. With the emphasis on process rather than competition for resources, Academic Audit provides an arena for honest self-examination. The audit process has provided statewide discussions of quality and opportunities for collegial work.”

NSCC – Dr. Jim Formosa – “The Academic Audit process has been one of the more meaningful experiences of my 20+ years in the board system. We go through SACS accreditation and ACBSP accreditation. Neither has had the impact of the Academic Audit. The key for us so far has been that we have a dean who is 100% behind the project. Each of us has learned from our colleagues.”



RSCC – Dr. Karen Brunner – Reacting to a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article on “department ethos,” Brunner said “it struck me that one of the most important differences between Academic Audit and traditional program review is that this issue of a department’s ethos is very much at the core of the departmental reflection associated with Academic Audit. Providing a structure for faculty members themselves to come to conclusions about the character and future of their department is one of the greatest strengths of this initiative.”

STCC – Dr. Ada Shotwell – “As a dean, I see the Audit as a great opportunity to reinforce the issues I have tried to convey as important for the division. They heard me, but they did not really “hear” me until now.

This process emphasizes quality principles, thus strengthening the commitment that I have to the Baldrige criteria as a way of life for my division and for the college.”

TSU – Dr. Harriette Bias-Insignares – “I am impressed with the change in the culture and the dynamics of faculty relations in our department: the trust, willingness to speak openly, and involvement that was not there before. Academic Audit has brought about bonding, branding, and empowerment. We have a new awareness of our mutual value and responsibility to the success of all departmental activities.”



TSU – Dr. Ali Sekmen – “Our department is planning to go through the accreditation process soon, and the self-study was critical for us to quantify our strengths and weaknesses. We were delighted to see how academic audit and accreditation differ. We believe that evaluating the process is very valuable. We could observe how teamwork makes us stronger, and I was personally impressed by that.”

U of M – Dr. M. Shah Jahan – “My brief comment is that this pilot project has given us an opportunity to revisit our ongoing efforts to improve both instructional and research programs at undergraduate as well as graduate levels, keeping our focus on research.”

