

Middle States Self-Study Report

College Review Draft

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Introduction

According to John J. Sweeney, Chair of the Board of Trustees, accreditation of the National Labor College (NLC) in March 2004 marked fulfillment of the “dream of former AFL-CIO president George Meany for a high-quality, fully-accredited college to serve the higher education needs of the nation’s working men and women and labor leaders.” Since the NLC completed its first self-study process and earned accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the College has continued to evolve and mature while adhering closely to its mission to serve the higher education needs and desires of working people and their union representatives.

In 2004, the George Meany Center-National Labor College became the National Labor College, marking a final step in the institution’s evolution from a training center to labor’s first college. From 2004 through 2007, 400 individuals graduated from the NLC with bachelor’s degrees. Additionally, hundreds of students have learned, grown, and developed through NLC courses. Senator Tom Harkin, who spoke at the ninth commencement in 2007, discussed unprecedented challenges facing the labor movement and compared NLC graduates to soldiers in the fight against fascism in World War II: “the graduates here today, will be reporting directly to the front line in the fight to lead and energize the labor movement in the United States.”

Another significant change at NLC has been the installation of the College’s second president in 2008. President William E. Scheuerman’s goals for the College are extensive; he stated, “we have to grow the College and expand its role. The NLC is the flagship institution of higher learning for working people, but it should also become one of the centers for discussion and debate on the challenges facing labor in the 21st century.” His initial goals include solidifying the College “brand” to share the message of its educational opportunities and setting the course for the College’s future through the development of a new strategic plan. He views the College as a key part of renewing the labor movement, noting, “The labor movement must now raise the standard of education to replace the high school diploma with a Bachelor’s degree. We need to make lifelong learning a routine part of workers’ lives. If we do not proceed in this way, we risk losing a quality of life and middle class it took a century to build.”

The construction of a state-of-the-art, 72,000-square-foot instructional and conference building changed the face of the physical campus and opened new opportunities for labor learning, allowing the NLC better delivery of courses and the provision of a conference center for labor unions around the country. The building opened in October of 2006 and was officially dedicated on February 8, 2007 in a ceremony that featured Maryland’s Governor Martin O’Malley and the first use of the building’s Solidarity Hall. O’Malley emphasized the connection between labor education and the middle class, stating “To strengthen and grow the middle class, we have to ensure that every working family can secure a decent wage, a good job, affordable health care, job training and the chance to advance in life. Our friends at the National Labor College provide the critical foundation to

help us expand opportunity to every Marylander.” The opportunities this new building affords are just beginning to be explored and realized.

Additional campus construction included the building of a new residence hall and the renovation of the older dormitories. In September 2004, the new dorm opened with 98 rooms and two suites along with a reading room that overlooks part of the scenic 47-acre campus. Other rooms on campus were refurbished to provide guests with comfortable, hotel-quality rooms; they are wired for Internet access, with private bathrooms and televisions. The student lounge, which features prominently in many of the multi-union discussions that take place during student time on campus, was renovated carefully to retain the charm of a favorite gathering place.

Beyond the physical growth of the College, expansion of educational offerings, including the addition of fully online courses, has improved the choices and learning opportunities for students. Enrollment trends for both the fully online courses and those offered in the traditional NLC “blended” format are on the rise. Through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the College is pursuing ways to increase outreach to underserved minorities who would benefit from the College’s program. Preliminary results of these efforts are encouraging.

To better manage the growth of enrollment and educational offerings, the College invested in the SunGard PowerCampus student information system, which has been integrated to work with Blackboard, the College’s distance learning delivery software. The initial conversion to the new system began in the summer of 2007; the connection to Blackboard was completed in early 2008, and training to optimize usage of the new capabilities is in progress. The expanded use of Blackboard has made a significant impact, and the College has accentuated the positive by providing support to faculty and students through a help desk and a series of customized, self-guided training instruments.

As the College has evolved, staff, administrators, and faculty have kept pace: staff and faculty growth through additions, education, and training have expanded the pool of available talents. Seasoned staff members pursued new degrees, completing a doctorate and two master’s degrees; other staff have doctoral and master’s degrees in progress. New positions in development, communications, online learning, registration, admissions, and financial aid were added. In 2004, a director of communications became part of the staff for the first time, and a new, more experienced registrar was hired. In 2005 a development office was created to coordinate ongoing activities and initiate new ventures for acquiring additional resources. That same year the College hired a deputy provost for online learning to coordinate and manage the expansion of student learning options. In 2007, a financial administrator was hired and in 2008 the position of director of admissions was created.

NLC has developed new structures to help guide the College’s growth. In 2005, a new bargaining agreement with the union representing the faculty addressed tenure, peer review, and processes for academic and curriculum review. The agreement also resulted in the establishment of a faculty senate. The development of new structures is ongoing. During the current academic year the provost has revised the student union structure in an attempt to overcome the difficulties that have prevented the development of an effective student representation mechanism.

While the College still faces numerous challenges, including the need for a more formal planning and assessment process, the development of a new strategic plan, and strategies to increase limited resources; overall, the institution is maturing well. In the 10 years since the College began to grant degrees, and in the five years since applying for accreditation, the institution's focus on its mission to make education available to workers has been strong and clear. The work continues with the solid support of the Board of Trustees, partners, alumni, administrators, staff, and faculty.

Who Are the National Labor College's Students?

Most NLC students work full time; they are from all over the United States, Canada, Guam, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, and they represent international and local labor unions from numerous trades, industries, and professions. While most NLC students have held either elected or appointed positions in their unions, as the College grows, many rank-and-file members are represented in the classrooms.

Adult students who report age issues as one of the challenges of studying at a traditional college have no problems at the NLC, as the student body is diverse, and most classes feature a mix of students of various ages and backgrounds. As the nation's only labor college, the NLC student body is populated by most of the occupational and industrial sectors: flight attendants; aerospace workers; educators and instructional aides; janitors; clerical workers; electricians; plumbers; federal, state, and local government workers; and many other areas. Growth in partnerships since 2004 have expanded the representation of some labor groups as partner unions reach out to their members to make it easier for them to access education.

Delivery Formats: Crafting Learning to Fit Workers' Schedules

A key aspect of the NLC's program is to make higher education available and accessible to workers, and the delivery formats are crafted to help students succeed in fulfilling their requirements, learning and achieving objectives, and earning their undergraduate degrees. Over the years, the College has evolved a hybrid or "blended" format that combines a week of in-residence classes with online components before and after. The hybrid structure has worked well for most students, who either use vacation time or professional development leave. During a 14-week term, students spend just six days in the traditional classroom, and students read, study, and learn for the remainder of the term under the guidance of distance classrooms in Blackboard.

Blackboard offers instructors the opportunity to frame the week-in-residence courses. By beginning courses online one month before the week-in-residence meetings, instructors use Blackboard to guide students through a series of assignments, usually including reading, posting to the discussion board, responding to other students' posts, and writing. This early interaction prepares students for the intense delivery of the course materials during the 18-hour, six-day week in residence. Additional interaction and assignments—lengthier essays and projects, discussions on Blackboard, and additional reading—takes place during the final online phase of the course.

Fully online courses were initially developed and piloted in the summer of 2005. Since students became interested in this delivery method, new class offerings have grown to about 50 courses. Students find it convenient to be able to take online classes when they cannot travel to the College for a term or to supplement their week-in-residence studies. Beyond the traditional definition of accessibility, the online courses make paying for college more accessible, because they eliminate travel and room and board costs. The online courses follow the same model for academic excellence of the hybrid courses.

Additionally, the Union Skills program continues to offer a broad range of courses for training in many areas of union management, safety and health, and leadership. Like the courses offered in the online and week-in-residence programs, the Union Skills courses have been evaluated for credit and may be included as part of students' degree plans. Most Union Skills courses are offered in 30-hour, week-long, intensive formats; some are being developed for online delivery.

The combination of the three types of courses enables the NLC to give working adults options in designing degree programs that work best for them, so they learn and succeed. Beyond the delivery formats, the courses offerings have diversified in the past five years; students have more choices among courses to fulfill their major and elective requirements.

The Degree Program: Educating Union Representatives

As an upper-level, two-year, degree completion school, the NLC has crafted a program that incorporates previous learning experiences and pushes students to gain the full perspective of liberal arts graduates. Students take at most 64 credits at the NLC, and, in many cases, they take as few as 30 credits, so the faculty has developed coherent core requirements and a clear progression of courses. The 15 credits (5 courses) of core requirements, described in more detail below, are the following:

- Educational Planning
- Introduction to Labor Studies
- Comparative Research Methods
- Senior Seminar
- Senior Project

Six areas of concentration, from which the students must take 12 credits, are the following:

- Labor Studies
- Labor Education
- Labor History
- Political Economy of Labor
- Union Leadership and Administration
- Labor Safety and Health

Students also choose three credits of elective work to complete their area of concentration requirements with some taking courses in their areas of concentration through approved NLC partnerships.

Admission: Since the NLC is an upper-level degree completion institution, it only accepts students who have completed at least 56 undergraduate credits. Those credits can come from other college transfer credit, formally-assessed apprenticeship programs, military service, ACE or PONZI accredited training, or fully-documented experiential learning, evaluated through the Educational Planning class and assessment process, described below.

Educational Planning: Almost all students take Educational Planning, the first of the five NLC core courses. The course introduces students to the NLC and serves as a bridge to upper-level college learning, requirements, and expectations. Additionally, the course provides a forum for initial student advising on areas of concentration, course choices, and what requirements remain to be met, including the five basic general education requirements (English, humanities, math, science, and social science). The course work is built around the development of a portfolio that documents formal training and life experience through a series of essays and documentation. Finally, by requiring structured writing assignments, faculty members learn about students' abilities to write at a college level.

The portfolio that results from Educational Planning details students' training and experiential learning. A team of experienced assessors examine the portfolios carefully to determine the number of experiential learning credits, relying on faculty and staff as labor-related subject matter experts where appropriate, and identifying areas where students may need to submit additional information for sufficient documentation.

Another key requirement is Introduction to Labor Studies, which provides an academic overview of the field of labor studies, touching on the range of subjects represented by the areas of concentration, while introducing students to the required writing and analytic standards of the College. Students are exposed to labor studies research and are expected to read and reference this research in their five assigned papers, demonstrating competence in citing sources and using evidence to support their arguments. This provides the basis for establishing skills in the core areas of competency, and helps to give undecided students a sense of what area of concentration they might choose.

Students have six majors to choose from. The most popular area by far is the generalist track of Labor Studies, in which students study a broad range of theory and practice in the field of labor. Students can examine labor culture through History of Labor Theatre or Images of Labor in Film, understand more about the legal and political environment in which they operate through Employment Rights, Comparative Labor Movements, and Union Organizing and Governance, or delve into the processes crucial to running their unions in Strategic Grievance Handling and Organizing and Representing the New Workforce. The other three majors that attract larger numbers of students are Labor Education, Union Leadership and Administration, and Labor Safety and Health. Labor Education provides current and aspiring union trainers and educators with an exploration of the theory, methods and practice of adult, distance, and labor education. Union Leadership and Administration allows students to examine union financial, ethical, and strategic decision making; issues relating to administration and structure of unions; and key union functions such as

bargaining and organizing. Labor Safety and Health provides students, many already working and training in the area of health and safety, with a rigorous academic and applied course of study in areas crucial to their members' well-being, such as industrial hygiene, the handling of hazardous materials, and occupational safety and health law. Additionally, some students pursue majors in Labor History or the Political Economy of Labor.

The final component of the core requirements is the Senior Block: Comparative Research Methods, Senior Seminar, and Senior Project. A central graduation requirement at the NLC is a major piece of original research—the Senior Project, the equivalent of an undergraduate honors thesis. Students are encouraged to choose research projects related to their areas of concentration that are important and meaningful to them and to their unions. The groundwork is laid in two courses, Comparative Research Methods and Senior Seminar, which students are required to take at the same time. The courses are taught jointly by two instructors; one takes the lead in the research class and the other in the seminar. In Senior Seminar, students read and critique a variety of labor research projects and then work their way through a process of designing a research project. Particular attention is paid to defining a problem, question, or hypothesis; making choices about direction and scope of the project; identifying the literature that provides the knowledge base and context for the project, and reviewing bibliographic and citation guidelines. In Comparative Research Methods, students learn about the range of research methodologies and how to make appropriate methodological choices for their particular projects.

Learning Assessment: Measuring Growth

The entire degree program is designed to ensure students gain core competencies needed for success in the 21st century. The Learning Assessment Plan continues to be the organizing force behind the development of courses and their learning objectives. It describes a system of learning assessment that employs qualitative measures of individual student learning, gauges the effectiveness of individual courses, considers overall student learning, and examines learning as a component of institutional effectiveness. The College is deeply committed to continuous and ongoing assessment of student learning to ensure the realization of the mission and the high quality of the academic program.

Through the leadership of the Academic Standards and Curriculum Committees, the Learning Assessment Plan has become a living document that unites the courses, majors, and programs around a set of six core competencies:

- *Leaders:* NLC educates individuals who, for the most part, already play significant leadership roles within their unions, but it builds on this knowledge by helping students reflect upon, share, and deconstruct their experiences to analyze the elements of successful leadership. The ultimate goal is to improve students' and organizations' leadership practices.
- *Critical Thinkers:* To be successful and to be in a position to improve the lives of those they represent, union leaders must be able to analyze massive amounts of information and to distinguish between critical and non-critical information.

- *Effective Communicators:* No one can effectively participate in or lead a democratic and member-based organization like a union without having the ability to communicate clearly and forcefully orally and in writing. Union leaders must be able to describe, analyze, and advocate effectively in a variety of work contexts.
- *Global Thinkers:* Today's union leaders must understand the complexities of the economic, political, and social environment and be able to examine this environment through many perspectives, understanding the challenges of change and diversity in the workplace and the union, along with the forces that affect the lives of workers.
- *Information Literate:* Leaders must be able to make intelligent decisions based upon the massive amounts of information available. They must be able to find, sort, intelligently select from, and then carefully analyze the data to determine the most appropriate choices for their members. Knowing where to obtain information and how to assess its validity and reliability is crucial to making the right decision.
- *Technologically Proficient:* As with the rest of society, the labor movement now uses computers as a major form of communication and connection. Because many NLC students came through school at a time when computers were not as common, the College has a special obligation to ensure that students can operate effectively in the computer age, using basic union tools such as email, spreadsheets, and the Internet.

In addition to examining courses for their effectiveness in addressing these core competencies, the Curriculum Committee requires an analysis of each new course in terms of the competencies. The College is committed to ensuring that all of its work connects to the mission through focus on these competencies.

Partnerships

NLC has benefited from the development of partnership agreements with unions and other colleges or universities. Union partnerships have extended outreach to partners' members and have helped create support systems to make it easier for workers to pursue their bachelor's degrees. Partnering with institutions who share in the NLC mission to make education available to workers has enabled the College to establish articulation agreements that permit academic and union partners to deliver up to 15 credits of upper-level coursework. These credits are part of the last 30 required NLC credits and constitute the area of concentration. Both types of articulation agreements provide students with an opportunity to complete their degrees in a setting closer to home and/or in the context of union-based educational programs related directly to the type of work they do.

Academic partnerships have been established with institutions with high standards and respected labor studies faculty. Their labor studies programs offer nontraditional students individual courses and certificate programs in various labor areas of concentration, but either do not grant degrees in labor studies or do not offer the necessary courses to fulfill graduation requirements in a nontraditional format. For example, Cornell University offers a labor certificate program at its New York City campus in evenings and on weekends.

Students who wish to earn a bachelor's degree from Cornell, however, must attend classes at the main campus in Ithaca, virtually all of which are offered in the traditional semester format. As an alternative, working through the NLC's articulation arrangement, students can benefit from learning opportunities at Cornell, yet still earn a nontraditional NLC degree. While the academic partner programs are accredited and standards are monitored as part of their institutions' independent accreditation, the NLC maintains regular contact with partners, trouble-shooting and identifying students who might need additional academic support.

Union partnerships tap into the long history of union education programs; many unions have large education and training departments. Union articulation agreements were developed to maximize access to the NLC by involving unions in the design and delivery of courses directly relevant to student career development. Students who go through the program in organized union-based cohorts are more likely to finish within a defined period of time. Since the union partners are not independently accredited, the NLC reviews course content and the approval of instructors.

Evolving from a Training Center to a College: NLC History

In 1969, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) established a nonprofit labor studies center for national, regional, and local union leaders and rank-and-file members from across the country. Subsequently, the AFL-CIO purchased a 47-acre seminary campus in suburban Silver Spring, Maryland as a suitable permanent home for the center. Refurbished and formally dedicated on November 6, 1974, it was renamed the George Meany Center for Labor Studies in honor of the AFL-CIO president, who was the driving force behind its creation.

After the new campus opened, the George Meany Center partnered with Antioch University in Yellow Springs, Ohio to offer members an undergraduate degree completion program in labor studies. Over the next 20 years, more than 200 people took advantage of the program and received bachelor's degrees. The NLC is a direct descendant of this successful program.

By the mid-1990s, the demand for credit courses and college degrees had become greater than the Antioch program was able to fulfill. In 1995, the Board of Trustees authorized a study of the feasibility of the Meany Center seeking a license and accreditation to offer its own degree program. By becoming a college, the Center could expand the opportunities for labor leaders to earn degrees and challenge the faculty to measure the quality of their work against the best the nation had to offer. In 1997, the State of Maryland granted the Center a license to operate as an independent, upper-division, degree-granting institution of higher education. To this day it remains the only institution of higher learning in the United States that specializes in providing trade unionists with undergraduate education. It is also a pioneer in bringing higher education to working people, developing programs and partnerships that enable union members and other wage earners to secure appropriate, long overdue recognition for the college-level learning they acquire on the job and in the course of their union work.

Developing the Self-Study

The NLC began the self-study process by establishing a Steering Committee in the winter of 2007. Despite staff changes that impacted the composition of the Steering Committee, the self-study design was finalized in the summer of 2007. Members of the Steering Committee chaired the eight working groups assigned to address specific standards, and the remaining six standards were addressed by the Steering Committee in a series of monthly meetings to track progress, review working group reports, discuss findings, and establish recommendations that would be meaningful to the College's continued growth. Managers and faculty members from all areas of the College served on either the Steering Committee or in working groups; others were interviewed and provided key data and documentation needed for the study of the institution. Many students, staff, alumni, representatives from affiliated labor organizations, and members of the Board of Trustees have also participated in the process.

The self-study process has been an opportunity for the NLC to examine progress and opportunity, achievements and challenges, and overall growth. Many changes have been instituted, and the self-study has analyzed how the College has grown and shifted since initial accreditation and where it needs to go in the future. With the establishment of a strategic planning process now underway, the entire College community looks forward to making the best use the physical and distance education capabilities of an institution dedicated to working adults.

Mission and Goals

The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are utilized to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Introduction

In the five years (2003-2008) since the National Labor College (NLC) completed the first self-study, the College continues to achieve the dual mission of bringing higher education to workers and preparing union representatives to lead in the global economy. The structure of the course offerings makes education attainable for working people. Additionally, the NLC has extended its offerings by reaching out primarily to rank-and-file members through the pilot development of a Bachelor of Technical and Professional Studies (BTPS), a fully online degree that maximizes workers' access to higher education.

Effective labor organizations contribute to a stable, democratic society by unifying the working majority and giving them a voice, and education helps union leaders more effectively represent working men and women. The NLC mission to expand educational opportunity improves workers' abilities to participate and shape their futures in the changing global economy. By adopting the additional responsibility of helping individuals fulfill their educational aspirations, NLC further strengthens the labor movement by inspiring individuals to achieve the self-actualization inherent in the educational process.

Discussion

The mission statement's strength lies in its clarity and focus, going beyond a simple statement and extending into the planning and development of every aspect of the College. From the design of courses, built to fulfill the mission, to the organization of conference services, created to support the educational programs, the mission of outreach and leadership education is central to administrators, faculty, and staff.

The College has relied primarily on the mission to focus its development, rather than a strategic planning process that lays out a specific plan for growth. While there is a strategic plan, it needs to be updated by the new strategic planning process in development. Right now the clearly delineated Learning Assessment Plan directs the academic side, and the Financial Plan establishes links between resources and mission and examines goals for development and outreach. The change in presidential leadership has accelerated progress on

institutionalization of a planning and assessment process and development of a new overall strategic plan.

Collaborative efforts to serve the higher education needs of working people demonstrate a strong commitment to the mission among Academic Services faculty and staff. Academically, the College responds well to students and other involved unionists, surveying and questioning students to determine the training and formats that work best for their needs. For example, many students have limited time to attend week-in-residence courses, so weekend formats, online courses, and one-on-one tutoring options were created to ensure access to education for workers with varying needs. Additionally, as students expressed intentions to continue their studies on the graduate level and needed traditional grade point averages to meet admissions requirements, the College adapted its pass/fail grading policy to a four-point scale to help workers reach their educational goals. College personnel have made solid progress in bringing higher education to workers, and continued interaction with students, both formal and informal, will continue to build on this goal.

However, the College still struggles with gathering data needed to extend the understanding of the broader population of unionists—those who are not already connected to the College. By working through database challenges, including investing in a new student information system, the College is developing possibilities for outreach. The new system makes student data available for the first time through a secure Internet site, allowing students, faculty, and administrators access to information that could improve planning at all levels. New information for planning informs the objectives of three program coordinators who manage the week-in-residence, online, and Union Skills course offerings for maximum student access, efficient scheduling, and enrollment management. The software system also complements the pre-admissions advising program, which guides students through the admissions, registration, and matriculation process. Additionally, a new financial administrator will offer the expanded service necessary for the availability of Title IV federal financial aid during the 2008-2009 school year.

The expansion of the staff to include formal development and communication functions has begun to address the weakness of limited outreach, and the student population is growing. Some progress has been made in the area of fundraising, but the College continues to pursue new avenues for generating revenue to support growth and expansion of opportunities for workers.

Currently the College mission is coordinated with learning goals through the Learning Assessment Plan. Laying out a strategy within the goals of the mission statement, the Learning Assessment Plan asks, “What do these leaders need to deal with these complex challenges, to move themselves and those they represent through the complexities of work and leadership in the 21st century? What are the institutional learning goals of the College for each student?” The Plan then lays out institutional goals that respond specifically to the College’s mission, calling for students to develop their skills as leaders, critical thinkers, effective communicators, global thinkers and show that they are information literate and technologically proficient.

With these six clearly delineated institutional-level goals, or core competencies, that present strategies to achieve the College’s mission, the Learning Assessment Plan drives the

objectives of all courses. Each syllabus explains to students how the specific course objectives fit within the core competencies; additionally, each syllabus offers details about student assessment within the course, so grades and student educational growth reflect the core competencies, and, thus, the College mission.

Evaluation of courses' fulfillment of the mission is ongoing, through the work of the Curriculum Committee and the Academic Standards Committee. In 2004, the committees established a syllabus template and evaluated syllabi in terms of fulfilling the core competencies. Faculty members developing new courses are required to submit Core Competencies and Course Objectives grids that delineate each course's role in fulfilling the College mission, and the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committees periodically review syllabi. Students also have the opportunity to respond to the learning objectives and their fulfillment by completing course evaluations that are tabulated and shared with faculty and administrators. Reassessment of course objectives and presentation methods then sharpen the fulfillment of students' learning needs.

Additionally, the College continues to meet students' educational needs by creating courses that students see as valuable to their challenges and interests. Since the last self-study in 2003, faculty have crafted numerous new classes, ranging from computer skills courses at multiple levels to humanities courses including art, literature, and music history to safety courses that address issues in the work force like bio-terrorism and chemical emergency response. Students' educational interests are regularly assessed through various mediums, including informal surveys during week-in-residence welcome functions, email surveys of past and current students, and evaluation questionnaires. Graduate surveys help determine the strengths and weaknesses and the impact of education on individuals. Responses result in analysis and adjustment to the programs to continue improvement and strengthen connection to the mission.

Additionally, the College personnel recognize the push towards strategic planning inherent in the mission's goals. To truly achieve the challenge posed by the mission, the College needs a dynamic strategy for success that blends the nurturing quality of its academic programs and the revenue demands necessary for economic independence.

Fundamental Elements

Do the Mission, Goals, and Objectives Guide Decision Making?

The NLC mission is clearly defined. The Learning Assessment Plan helps keep the courses focused on the mission statement, but additional work is needed in strategic planning. Many of the mission's goals established in the 2003 Self-Study have been achieved: the College has gained full accreditation, improved its financial planning, increased access to its programs for full-time workers, continued to develop the bachelor of arts program, piloted the Bachelor of Technical/Professional Study program, developed a campus master plan for the physical plant, and created post baccalaureate study options.

Is There Support for Appropriate Scholarly and Creative Activity?

The NLC faculty are focused almost exclusively on instruction and student development, rather than research and publication. While the College fosters a supportive environment for scholarly and creative thinking, faculty dedicate their time to ensuring that the NLC is a teaching college and offering extensive support to students' research projects. However, faculty members publish in labor and academic journals and continue to pursue education and training opportunities. Additionally, extensive support is offered to students: faculty coordinate conferences for student presentations and help students find avenues for publication of their Senior Project findings.

Are the Mission, Goals and Objectives Developed Collaboratively?

Decision making at the NLC is collaborative, and representatives from multiple areas of the College participate in numerous ways. Since the College is small, the senior administrators can consult individually and collectively to allow input into decisions about priorities and direction. The administration, faculty, and staff have worked together to develop new and sustain ongoing programs through meetings, work planning sessions, and informal interaction. The faculty governance procedures and Faculty Senate broaden and strengthen the collaborative planning process.

Have the Mission, Goals and Objectives Been Formally Approved and Widely Disseminated?

The mission statement was formally approved by the Board of Trustees; it is printed in the College Course Catalog and posted on the website.

Do the Mission, Goals and Objectives Formally Relate to External and Internal Contexts?

The external context of the College ties to the state of the labor movement, particularly as it relates to the AFL-CIO and its affiliates. The shifting membership of AFL-CIO impacts the College, as it did when the Change to Win Coalition seceded from the AFL-CIO in the summer of 2005. However, the NLC maintained its commitment to working people, regardless of their union's affiliation, and students from the Change to Win Coalition continue to comprise a large part of the student body, and several of their international unions support the mission of the College.

The College continues to work closely with the AFL-CIO, and has formalized its interactions with member unions through partnership agreements. Half of the Board of Trustees of the College are principal officers of labor unions or of the AFL-CIO. In addition, the processes for decision-making rely heavily upon close consultation and coordination with affiliated unions of the AFL-CIO.

The internal context of the College, and the formal linkages to its mission, goals and objectives are addressed formally through the process of learning assessment and the annual planning process. In summary, the College collects data about the fulfillment of its mission and engages many internal stakeholders (faculty, staff, alumni, and partners) in addressing any shortfalls.

Are the Institutional Goals and Objectives Consistent With the Mission?

The institutional goals and objectives of the College are consistent with its mission. The College's mission is to educate today's union leaders and activists and to provide access to higher education to working men and women; the goals and objectives are substantially consistent with the mission.

Do the Goals and Objectives Focus on Student Learning and Institutional Improvement?

As described in the Learning Assessment Plan and the Financial Plan, the mission of the College focuses on student learning. Institutional improvement and goals for continued growth will be described in the forthcoming Strategic Plan.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Formalize the ongoing assessment of the College mission.
2. Explore the possibilities for expanding outreach to workers not yet represented by unions.

Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.

Introduction

Significant changes have impacted the National Labor College's work in planning, resources allocation, and institutional renewal. The installation of the College's second president has brought a new vision to the campus, as the strategic plan is revisited and a new planning process is established. Additionally, the construction of a new conference center and the renovation of the dormitories have expanded the College's capacity to serve as both a college and a union and community conference facility. Finally, the College's academic programs have grown in response to students' educational needs and partnership agreements.

While planning is extensive at the departmental level, where work plans are engaged to design task-oriented plans to accomplish stated goals and objectives and best use resources, a revision of the strategic plan will unify the approach to better fulfilling the College mission. As a whole, the College has moved forward in maximizing access to and use of its facilities, both physical and academic. With plans for continued growth, the College began a comprehensive strategic planning revision process with a deadline of May 2008.

Discussion

The NLC currently operates under an institution-wide strategic plan that was developed several years ago and has not been substantially revised in the intervening period. One of the most immediate priorities of the new NLC president is the formation of a permanent body representative of all relevant stakeholders that will be responsible for institution-wide planning and assessment on a continuing basis. He has established a deadline of May 2008 for the realization of this objective. The first task of the new assessment and planning group will be to initiate a comprehensive revision of the existing strategic plan in light of the experiences and developments of the past several years. As a first step, the College has retained the services of an outside consultant who will assist in both the development of the permanent process and the immediate revision of the plan.

The responsibility for planning within the units of the College is more clearly defined and has been carried out more consistently and effectively than has the institution-wide planning. In past years the president of the College has articulated to the administrative team the

current strategic goals and priorities. Departmental work plans are used to define tasks for the upcoming year in light of the overall goals and priorities that have been established. When properly carried forward, the work plan process is designed to reference resource needs associated with an area of work as well. The most senior administrators of the College, for whom these reports are prepared, are asked to deliberate over the relative priorities and allocation of budgetary resources.

The work planning process has facilitated communication throughout the institution, providing senior administrators with the information and opportunity to coordinate the activities of the College across its several divisions and departments. A formal institution-wide planning process would enhance the linkages and coordination of these efforts.

While the different units of the College are engaged in assessment of their ongoing activities and are constantly attempting to improve performance and achieve better results, the creation of an institution-wide nexus for assessment efforts has the potential to significantly improve the concrete outcomes and result in the establishment of more formalized benchmarks.

With regard to its external constituents, the College's critical stakeholders are the leaders and key staff of national unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO. While not part of a formal planning process, this outreach has been accomplished in several ways. The most formal and routinized process has been through the NLC Board of Trustees.

Fundamental Elements

Are There Goals and Objectives or Strategies, Both Institution-Wide and for Individual Units That are Clearly Stated, Reflect Conclusions Drawn From Assessment Results, Are Linked to Mission and Goal Achievement, and Are Used for Planning and Resource Allocation at the Institutional and Unit Levels?

The goals and objectives of the College are articulated clearly in the existing strategic plan. However the plan has not been updated primarily because there is no established mechanism for ongoing assessment and planning at the institutional level. At the departmental level, the goals and priorities are clearly defined and are reshaped by the responsible administrators based upon feedback and analysis from previous efforts. Senior administrators assume the responsibility for ensuring that departmental goals are appropriately linked to the institutional mission and that resources are appropriately allocated for these efforts.

Are There Planning and Improvement Processes That are Clearly Communicated, Provide for Constituent Participation, and Incorporate the Use of Assessment Results?

The College's mission and its goals and objectives have been under discussion for several years with the Board of Trustees. Each of them represents an important union or public constituency, and they discuss and decide the direction of the College. While trustees may not identify this work as strategic planning, all will recognize the mission and major goals as frequent topics of discussion.

The College has enhanced the role of its union constituents in the planning process by formalizing and coordinating educational partnerships with over two dozen labor organizations. The most active and effective of these partnerships are characterized by a close working relationship between the Academic Services Department and the partners to assess educational needs, at both the institutional and individual level, and shape work plans and the NLC's longer-term plans in ways that reflect these needs.

The partnerships also provide an important informal institutional assessment mechanism while serving the educational needs and interests of union members. That so many unions have chosen to articulate their educational programs with the College is in itself a testament to the quality and reputation of NLC offerings. Indeed, the decision to become a college in the first place was in a very real sense a direct response to indications from the affiliates that they would welcome such a decision.

The fundamental emphasis of the NLC's assessment efforts is learning assessment described later in this report. In essence, the College strives to create an assessment loop by measuring its students' success in achieving certain competencies. This is accomplished through the outcomes of the capstone measure of the degree program, the Senior Project, through graduate school admission rates, and through student survey. The results of this assessment are fed back through faculty governance structures. These processes are described fully in the Learning Assessment Plan.

Are There Well Defined Decision-Making Processes and Authority That Facilitates Planning and Renewal?

There is a well-defined decision-making process and authority that facilitates planning and renewal. The president is the chief executive officer, and the provost is the chief academic officer supported by a deputy provost for academic services and a deputy provost for online learning. The executive vice president is the chief financial officer of the College and is supported by directors of human resources, conference services and hospitality, and a controller. This administrative structure is set forth in the current organizational chart. Decision making takes place at weekly senior management meetings.

Is Responsibility for Improvements Assigned and Accountability Assured?

At the beginning of each planning cycle, administrative unit chiefs are responsible for reviewing the previous year's plan and noting whether benchmarks have been met. Evidence demonstrating that the benchmarks have been met, or a statement of the reasons why they were not met, is then included in the subsequent work plan. The various assessment loops are fed into this process as well, and work plans are created or modified to incorporate changes in direction.

Is There a Record of Institutional and Unit Improvement Efforts and Their Results?

Departmental work plans are generally kept on file and serve as the best available measure of unit improvements and the best mechanism for assuring accountability. The departments use a variety of approaches to track their progress toward meeting the specific objectives in their areas of work. As the work planning process becomes more fully coordinated with strategic planning, similar measures and records will be developed across the institution.

Is There Periodic Assessment of the Effectiveness of Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal Processes?

The Board of Trustees and senior administrators periodically assess the College's resource allocation process. The implementation of the formal planning and assessment process is intended to address the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Implement an integrated institution-wide strategic planning and assessment process.
2. Finalize and implement the new strategic plan
3. Coordinate the work planning process with the revised strategic plan.

Institutional Resources

The human, financial, technical, facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

Introduction

During the approximately five years that have elapsed since the first self-study process at the National Labor College, the College has continued to experience some constraints associated with a limited base of resources. Notwithstanding that reality, the College has made substantial progress in improving the resource base most notably with respect to its physical plant.

Since September of 2004, the NLC has opened one new residence hall and completely revamped and refurbished two others to widespread acclaim from both students and conference attendees. More notably, the Lane Kirkland Center building was opened in the fall of 2006. This facility greatly improved the quality and quantity of facilities available for educational and conference use on the George Meany Campus. The College was able to finance these physical improvements, which increase the overall value of NLC assets, through a combination of sources including government grants and private donations. However, one result of these developments is that the College now has assumed the obligations of a substantial mortgage.

The College has also made substantial strides toward the development of additional funding resources. In 2005, the College established a full-time staff position devoted to development and fundraising efforts. There have been tangible results in obtaining funds from a number of diverse sources in the ensuing years. Since 2003, the College has obtained three congressionally-directed grants totaling in excess of \$2.5 million, which have been used to substantially update the curriculum, particularly online offerings, and to make improvements to the student information system. Another congressionally-directed grant in excess of \$700,000 has been obtained for fiscal year 2008-2009. The College is currently in the final year of a three-year grant totaling in excess of \$1 million from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. These funds have been used primarily to improve the online program and to expand and strengthen the network of partnerships described elsewhere in this report.

Discussion

Over the past several years, the College has improved the process by which it manages its budgeting and allocation of resources. This has resulted in resource allocations that better reflect the mission and goals of the institution.

In addition to regular weekly meeting of the president and vice presidents, senior administrators meet several times in the spring to establish organizational priorities of the College. Out of those discussions emerges annual priorities consistent with the overall long-range mission and goals of the College (found in the introductory pages of the College's annual budget). On an annual basis, individual departments use those priorities as a guide in planning work projects for the upcoming year, including estimated allocation of resources needed to accomplish various projects. Under the supervision of the executive vice president, these cost estimates are incorporated into an overall budget that is reviewed by the other senior administrators and ultimately approved by the Board of Trustees. Because the constraint of available resources is very real, this process has been vital in keeping the use of resources tightly focused on the considered priorities of the institution.

Another development that has been beneficial to the College has been the development of improved tools and the employment of more careful analysis of the income and spending for Conference Services and Academic Services. As a result, revenue and spending projections used in budgets have proven to meet an acceptable degree of accuracy. The improvement has been markedly more clear with respect to conference services numbers and there is room for continued improvement as far as the Academic Services projections and analyses are concerned.

Another particular example of the College's improved management of resources may be found with respect to the Alumni Association. Working in close cooperation with the elected alumni officers, the financial affairs of the association have been brought within the structure of the College's audited financial structure which should ensure transparency and accountability in the use of the designated funding.

Fundamental Elements

Are There Strategies to Measure and Assess the Level of, and Efficient Utilization of Institutional Resources Required to Support the Institution's Mission and Goals?

The efficient use of resources depends upon the ability to analyze data reflecting the impact of resource allocation decisions. Under the leadership of the executive vice president and the controller, the College has made significant strides in developing access to the necessary data and subjecting it to proper analysis. The tangible results of these efforts are significantly more pronounced with regard to Conference Services activities (e.g., room nights) than they are with respect to Academic Services activities (e.g., tuition). Additional improvements can be anticipated through the efforts of the new financial administrator within the Academic Services department and continued efforts to refine usage of the new student information system.

Are Rational and Consistent Policies in Place to Determine Allocation of Assets?

Currently, allocation of resources closely follows the determination of strategic priorities by the president and the senior administrators of the College. Budget teams are assembled to study areas of spending and to propose budgets for particular areas, taking into account individual departments' plans for the upcoming period. Based on these proposals and

discussions among senior administrators, funding choices are made in light of the full list of organizational priorities.

Is There an Allocation Approach That Ensures Adequate Faculty, Staff, and Administration to Support the Institution's Mission and Outcomes Expectations?

The College has taken a number of significant steps to ensure the adequacy of staffing to meet the institution's goals. In the past year, for example, the Academic Services department has begun a major reorganization and redeployment of existing resources in order to better serve the student population. Because the overall pool of resources remains limited, the College constantly strives to squeeze extra utility out of what is available. There are examples of the College making these efforts in a sustained way to extract more production and output. In addition, the current decision calculus concerning allocation of resources focuses intently upon the overall priorities of the institution.

The College continues to rely on a generous annual subsidy from the AFL-CIO, which is the largest single source of funding for NLC programs. The Board of Trustees, upon which sits the executive officers of the AFL-CIO and the presidents of several AFL-CIO affiliate unions, expects this subsidy to continue. Nevertheless, the Board and the senior administrators of the College are charting a course that envisions significantly expanding other sources of revenue for the College. Two other significant sources of revenue for the College are tuition and fees generated by the degree and non-degree programs, and the income generated by renting campus facilities. The multi-year budget projections anticipate increases in both of these sources.

Nonetheless, NLC officers and trustees are fully aware that increases in these sources of revenue will not be sufficient to fully cover the operating costs of the institution. During the past five years, the College has secured significant external resources to support its activities.

Since 2003, the College has obtained three congressionally-directed grants totaling in excess of \$2.5 million that have been used to substantially update the curriculum, particularly online offerings, and to make improvements to the student information system. Another congressionally-directed grant in excess of \$700,000 has been obtained for fiscal year 2008-2009. These funds have enabled the College to undertake improvements that enhance opportunities for students to master the research, writing, and critical thinking skills they must have to successfully complete the demanding NLC curriculum, including the original research paper required from every graduate.

Since 2003, the State of Maryland has granted the College operating funds under the Sellinger program for independent colleges and universities. This fund provides direct support for existing programs based on the full-time equivalent enrollments of the College. The NLC received approximately \$320,000 from the State in 2007-2008 under the state budget formula.

The College is currently in the final year of a three-year grant totaling in excess of \$1 million from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. These funds have been used primarily to improve the online program and to expand and strengthen the network of partnerships described elsewhere in this report.

Is There a Financial Planning and Budgeting Process Aligned With the Institution's Mission, Goals, and Plan That Provides for an Annual Budget and Multi-Year Budget Projections Both Institution-Wide and Among Departments?

Under the leadership of the executive vice president, an activity-based budgeting process has been developed that links to the distinct functions of the College. This budgeting process has enabled the College to ensure that it is devoting sufficient resources to its educational programs and to allocate its resources in a rational and consistent manner. The current budget reflects these allocations. A five-year budget, tied to the strategic goals of the College, has been developed along these lines as well.

Does the Financial Planning and Budgeting Process Utilize Planning and Assessment Documents, and Address Resource Acquisition and Allocation for the Institution?

The budget process utilizes planning documents and assessment data to provide the College with a context within which it can allocate and chart the acquisition of additional resources, as appropriate. This is comprised of monthly reports, sent to administrators with budgetary oversight responsibilities. These are reviewed by senior administrators to assure that the planned allocation and projected acquisition of resources is being achieved.

In addition, the College keeps a multi-year financial model on the basis of these documents and data. These reviews help to insure that future resources are being allocated rationally and that revenue projections hold for future years. The reviews also allow the College to revise its plans as required to meet unexpected changes in either revenues or expenditures. To facilitate this review, the executive vice president and the controller have developed reports that can be frequently updated and are easily understandable. These reports indicate both revenue and expenditure streams and their relationship to projected budget figures.

Is There a Comprehensive Infrastructure or Facilities Master Plan and Facilities/Infrastructure Life-Cycle Management Plan, as Appropriate to Mission, and Evidence of Implementation?

The College has just completed the execution of a comprehensive facilities plan, and is in the process of developing a plan for its future. Sufficient funds were raised to finance the construction of the Lane Kirkland Center, the construction of a new residential facility, and the refurbishment of other facilities on campus. The engineering staff has created and implemented a preventive maintenance program coinciding with the progress of the campus renovation and building project. Significant aspects of the campus renovation remain unfunded as of this date, however, most notably necessary repairs to the academic services building.

The George Meany Campus is a 47-acre site consisting of ten buildings of various ages and conditions. The campus itself is the main fiscal as well as physical asset of the NLC. Zoned for residential use, a special exemption permits the NLC to operate as a nonprofit educational institution. This zoning status complicates the task of expanding current facilities and reduces the value of the property as an asset but by no means wholly negates their appropriate use. The new master plan will combine the work being done to change the zoning status with the overall strategic work, currently in process. This will include a life-cycle management plan.

Is There Recognition in the Comprehensive Plan That Facilities, Such as Learning Resources Fundamental to all Educational and Research Programs and Libraries, Are Adequately Supported and Staffed to Accomplish the Institution's Objectives for Student Learning, Both on Campus and at a Distance?

The important motivation in building the Lane Kirkland Center was to ensure that the College continued to have the facilities and resources it requires to fulfill its mission. New state-of-art computer labs have replaced the temporary facilities that housed the computerized learning resources. An 8,000-square-foot multi-purpose educational center is a key component of the building, with full audio-visual, teleconferencing capabilities, and other educational and technological amenities. For the most part, current staffing levels should be sufficient to meet expansion goals over the next five years. As part of the campus plan (see the previous section), future needs are being addressed.

Resources have been invested in the online library program as well as the physical library. Holdings have increased regularly, and the addition of a labor film library has enhanced the collection overall. Unfortunately, access to distance library databases is limited on site, because the library workstations have become outdated; the College looks to refurbish these computers in the near future. The librarians track new, relevant releases and make them available to students and faculty. Since many students and some adjunct faculty need books at a distance, arrangements have been made to fulfill these needs with an interlibrary loan program. The NLC is raising funds to expand the offerings of the library to include e-books and health related online periodicals.

Is There an Educational and Other Equipment Acquisition and Replacement Process and Plan, Including Provision for Current and Future Technology, as Appropriate to The Educational Programs and Support Services, and Evidence of Implementation?

A substantial percentage of furniture and mechanical equipment was replaced as part of the renovation project mentioned above. The current budget allows for the replacement of one-third of the desktop computer equipment campus-wide, with another third in each of the two following years. That cycle has been in place, and closely adhered to, for several years, thereby assuring equipment no older than three years on every desk. Upon the completion of the campus renovation, all equipment and furnishings have been placed on an obsolescence schedule.

Are There Adequate Institutional Controls to Deal With Financial, Administrative and Auxiliary Operations, and Rational and Consistent Policies and Procedures in Place to Determine Allocation of Assets?

A number of years ago, the Board of Trustees adopted a detailed procurement and purchase authorization policy closely modeled after federal requirements. The impetus for the adoption of such a policy was a recommendation by the College's independent auditor. The policy has formalized practices for the procurement of services from outside contractors and internal controls for the approval of expenditures. It also includes a campus-wide system for expense authorization, which assures that decisions on expenditures are made by appropriate senior administrators.

Is There an Annual Independent Audit Confirming Financial Responsibility, With Evidence of Follow-Up on any Concerns Cited in The Audit's Accompanying Management Letter?

The entire financial operation of NLC is subject to independent external audit every year, currently by the Calibre CPA Group. Because of federal grants received by NLC, these audits must conform to standards established in appropriate federal rules and regulations. The most recent period for which the completed audit is available is the 2006-2007 fiscal year. Comments in the management letter are addressed directly by the executive vice president, and are being implemented.

Is There Periodic Assessment of the Effective and Efficient Use of Institutional Resources?

The annual budget process gives staff teams the opportunity to look at spending within each objective category, with an eye to efficiencies. The planning process itself evaluates the effectiveness of resource allocation, by engaging important discussions about the NLC's institutional investment in certain priorities. The procurement policy requires that a study of appropriate spending be made for each purchase. Operations staff periodically review contracts with vendors to determine better or less expensive sources for products and services. The relatively lean staffing causes a continuous evaluation of better ways to use limited resources as described above.

Recommendation for Improvement

Expand the capacity for students to access virtual library resources as part of the educational program.

Leadership and Governance

The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

Introduction

The College has made tangible strides in leadership and governance since going through the initial accreditation process. The College has assembled trustees made up of public, business, education, and union leadership, creating an aggregate board that is representative of the community served by the institution. The College has also developed a faculty governance structure that is defined although not fully realized. In view of the operational challenges and resulting realities, leadership and governance is one area that offers genuine opportunity for continued growth.

Under the leadership of the new president, the College has moved aggressively to fill Board of Trustees vacancies and institute formal orientation events for new Board members. President Scheurman is also committed to a more formal process of self-assessment for ongoing Board activities.

Discussion

On paper, the governance responsibilities of all constituencies in terms of integration and independence are clearly defined. The College has developed a broad-based, independent Board of Trustees, and the final authority for governance of the College resides with that body. Consistent with that design, the trustees are ultimately responsible for setting both academic and financial policies; and the College has all the requisite documents including the Amended Certificate of Incorporation, Bylaws, and Mission Statement to reflect the institution's goals. While this well-defined system is clearly spelled out in plan, the day-to-day operational realities suggest multiple struggles, which arise from disconnects between intent and actuality.

When choosing the NLC Board of Trustees, great care goes into selecting public, academic, and business leaders who are clearly at the top of their fields. While this process allowed the NLC to attract a distinguished list of accomplished trustees, it also created some governance challenges. Though many trustees put great effort into Board matters, the incredibly busy schedules of some high-level Board members creates logistical hurdles for consistent meeting attendance and fully productive engagement. The fact that many of the trustees are so busy suggests that each member greatly benefits from advance meeting material to enhance preparation.

Given the distinguished professional stature of many of the NLC Board members, there is little debate that the influential trustees play a significant role generating resources to improve the College. In fact, many trustees on the Board have provided lucrative individual monetary donations to the College while also committing to raising funds from other sources. To further address fundraising needs, the Board established a Finance Committee designed to generate resources that will secure the long-term financial health of the College. The committee's initial focus was to secure sufficient funding for construction of new facilities and maintenance of existing buildings; however, the College still faces significant fiscal challenges.

Extensive discussion of the College budget and potential sources for revenue take place at Board meetings. For example, discussions about the feasibility of having partner unions endow chairs at the College was explored in the May 2007 Board of Trustees meeting, and the chair announced the appointment of a joint committee composed of members of the AFL-CIO Executive Council and the NLC Board of Trustees to study financial issues at the College. As reported at the most recent trustee meeting, the Board is making progress in overcoming the financial challenges facing the College through expanding fundraising measures, such as developing a Workers Memorial Project.

Given the limited resources of the College and the expectation this condition will not change soon, it is not likely a larger faculty base will provide greater opportunity for broader faculty governance participation. In light of this, the evolution of the faculty governance system towards relying on monthly meetings of the resident faculty to address governance issues, may be better suited for the institution's size.

Fundamental Elements

Is There a Well-Defined System of Collegial Governance Including Written Policies Outlining Governance Responsibilities of Administration and Faculty That Is Readily Available to the Campus Community?

The Board of Trustees has the ultimate authority for NLC governance, including overseeing the academic and financial policies that guide the operation and development of the College. Additionally, monthly faculty meetings serve as a forum for collective decisions about educational policy, but all substantial changes must be reviewed and approved by the Board. Documents that define the governance structure, namely the Amended Certificate of Incorporation and the Bylaws, are available to the campus community.

Do the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws Delineate the Governance Structure?

The Amended Certificate of Incorporation and the Bylaws outline the governance structure of the NLC, with the Amended Certificate of Incorporation establishing the College as a nonprofit 501c(3) corporation, describing the mission, and confirming the authority of the Board of Trustees over the Bylaws. The Bylaws state in Section 2, "The Board of Trustees has the ultimate authority for all general, academic, and financial policies of this corporation." They also delineate the composition of the Board to include 24 members, including the AFL-CIO president as the chair and the AFL-CIO treasurer as the Board

treasurer. Additionally, the Bylaws establish the Executive Committee, which nominates all Board members and handles Board business between meetings; semi-annual meetings to elect officers and approve the budget; the role of the College president as chief executive officer; the role of the provost as the chief academic officer; and rules for the appointment and approval of vice presidents.

Do the Governing Documents Assign Authority and Accountability for Policy Development and Decision Making?

The governing documents clearly assign authority and accountability for College policy and decision making. The Amended Certificate of Incorporation vests governing authority in the Board of Trustees and gives the Board broad discretion to adopt bylaws and structures to fulfill the purposes of the College. The Bylaws establish the offices of president as chief executive officer and provost as chief academic officer. They also provide for an Executive Committee of the full Board to act on its behalf on a limited number of matters between regularly scheduled Board meetings.

Do the Governing Documents Provide a Selection Process for Governing Body Members?

The Bylaws present a selection process for members of the Board of Trustees. The Executive Committee nominates candidates to fill vacancies and expired terms, and nominees are approved by a majority vote of the entire Board of Trustees. A two-thirds vote of the Board is required for removal of any trustees not serving as ex officio members.

Is There Appropriate Opportunity for Student Input Regarding Decisions That Affect Them?

Although incorporating student input into decisions that affect them at the NLC has proven difficult, given the low residency and online formats of the courses, a Steward's Council was introduced during the winter term of 2008. While the student union format proved unwieldy in the past, the new structure appears to be working well.

Following a process familiar to most union members—the steward election—each class elects a class steward on the Monday of the week in residence; this gives students time to get to know one another and make good choices for representation. The election takes place by secret ballot; ballots are counted and the winner announced by a non-partisan staff member. Stewards agree to represent their class members throughout the remainder of the term; their roles are not limited to the week in residence.

A stewards meeting takes place on the Monday evening of the week in residence, and stewards elect two to three chief stewards. During the meeting, the stewards discuss positives and negatives of the week-in-residence and course experiences and raise issues that need to be addressed. A second meeting later in the week is recommended, but left to the discretion of the Council.

On Thursday of the week in residence, the chief stewards meet with the provost and deputy provost to discuss the Council's findings. The meeting features a discussion of students' issues, concerns, and recommendations; where feasible and desirable, the administration will work to resolve any issues or implement recommendations during the week in residence. In

establishing this procedure, the administration of the College looks to the Steward's Council for help in building a similar structure for the online courses to ensure their inclusion in the decisions of the College. This issue is being followed up in meetings of the Distance Education Academic Steering Committee.

Additionally, students are encouraged to approach administrators, staff, and faculty with individual concerns and issues. In the event that students wish to appeal grades or findings of academic misconduct, they also have access to the Academic Review Committee.

Is There a Governing Body Capable of Reflecting Constituent and Public Interest, and Is It an Appropriate Size, and Does It Include Members with Sufficient Expertise to Assure that the Body's Fiduciary Responsibilities Can Be Fulfilled?

The Board of Trustees is comprised of members who reflect the College's mission to serve the educational needs of both the American labor movement and of individual working people. As the College's chief supporting body, the AFL-CIO lends its leadership and expertise to the College by including its president, executive vice president, and secretary-treasurer and their extensive experience on the NLC Board of Trustees. As ex officio members, the president, executive vice president, and secretary-treasurer are permanent representatives on the Board; they also serve on the Executive Committee. The College president, also a member of the Executive Committee, serves the Board as an ex officio member.

Additionally, nine trustees are chosen from among the members of the AFL-CIO Executive Council, the presidents of state labor federations, or the presidents of central labor councils; these choices guarantee that the NLC Board of Trustees reflect the interest of its constituents among organized labor. The expertise of these members enhances the Board's ability to gauge the educational needs of working people.

To address issues of public interest, 11 trustees are public members elected to serve a specific term of up to four years. Finally the president of the Alumni Association and the chair of the Faculty Senate are non-voting members ex officio, who offer insights from those areas of the College.

Is the Governing Body Chaired by Someone Other Than the Chief Executive Officer?

Section 7 of the Bylaws establishes the president of the AFL-CIO as chair of the Board of Trustees. The current chair is John J. Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO since 1995.

Does the Governing Body Certify to the Commission that the Institution Is in Compliance with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Policies of the Commission?

The Board of Trustees has endorsed the self-study process and has approved a resolution certifying compliance with eligibility requirements and accreditation standards.

Does The Governing Body Agree to Disclose Information Required by the Commission to Carry out Its Accrediting Responsibilities, Including any Levels of Governing Body Compensation?

The Board of Trustees has provided all information required by the Commission and all interim reports and Annual Institutional Profiles have been filed. None of the governing board members are compensated for their services.

Is There a Conflict of Interest Policy for the Governing Body Members that Assures that Those Interests Are Disclosed and that They Do Not Interfere with the Impartiality of Governing Body Members?

Section 19 of the Bylaws clearly spells out the conflict of interest policy with respect to members of the Board of Trustees. The policy calls for full disclosure and recusal from discussion or voting on issues whenever an individual Board member has a potential financial, personal, family, or corporate interest that might impair impartial judgment.

Does the Governing Body Assist in Generating Resources Needed to Sustain and Improve the Institution?

The Board of Trustees is required by the Bylaws, Section 11 to meet appropriately to adopt the academic/fiscal year budget. Additionally, significant portions of Board of Trustees meetings and Executive Committee meetings are invested in developing plans to generate resources and resolve budgeting shortfalls. Many Board members have contributed extensively to the College and have engaged the College's Conference Services program for their own meetings.

Is There a Process for Orienting New Members and Providing Continuing Updates for Current Members of the Governing Body on the Institution's Mission, Organization, Academic Programs, and Objectives?

A new orientation process for incoming Board of Trustees members has been developed by the new president for trustees joining the Board in February 2008. This orientation presents details to new members about the mission, organization, academic programs, and objectives, and key College documents are presented. Additionally, updates for current members are provided on an ongoing basis; as new publications and materials are developed, they are shared with Board members and the College community through emails and other correspondence.

Is a Procedure in Place for the Periodic Objective Assessment of the Governing Body In Meeting Stated Governing Body Objectives?

Although the chair and the president of the College routinely review the effectiveness of the governing body in consultation with other Board members, a more systematic assessment process of Board activities should be developed and implemented.

Is the Chief Executive Officer Appointed by the Governing Board, and Does the Chief Executive Officer Have Primary Responsibility to the Institution?

Section 14 of the Bylaws sets forth the selection process for the president. He has primary responsibility to the College and is responsible for its day-to-day operations.

Is There Periodic Assessment of the Effectiveness of Institutional Leadership and Governance?

The College's various partnerships with AFL-CIO affiliates provide an important institutional assessment mechanism. In effect, union partners collectively represent the educational needs and interests of their members with respect to the NLC, and by so doing magnify the institutional weight of student concerns. Student concerns are a significant driver of the College's continuous improvement efforts. As important as this process currently is to the functioning of the College, however, it can be more so if the lessons learned from it are incorporated more self-consciously into the College's planning process. Adoption of a strategic plan will institute a more formal planning and assessment process.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Augment the orientation of new board members, strengthen the regular communication process with all members of the Board, and formalize annual assessment to achieve the goal of a more active and engaged participation by the trustees in all aspects of the College.
2. Explore additional means for Board of Trustees and faculty to enhance generation of resources.
3. Assess an appropriate role for the Faculty Senate.

Administration

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance.

Introduction

Led for 10 years by Dr. Susan Schurman, the National Labor College succeeded in becoming a degree-granting institution in 1997 and earned accreditation in 2004, building upon the program originally offered through Antioch University. Schurman guided the College through the initial accreditation process, the renovation and construction of essential campus buildings, and the development of a college program dedicated to working men and women.

In August 2007, the College completed a search for its second president when Dr. William Scheuerman was selected by a unanimous decision of the Board of Trustees. Dr. Scheuerman brings together extensive experience as a worker, union leader, and academic. Vision and leadership for the institution are hallmarks of both presidents, along with a commitment to, and passion for, the labor movement. In the interim between presidents, Dr. Patricia Greenfield served as acting president, while continuing her role as chief academic officer.

Responsible for institutional planning, staffing, finding and allocating resources, the president's central role has been to insure that the institution fulfills its mission. As workers and labor leaders who pursued higher degrees while working and serving their unions, both Schurman and Scheuerman lived through the experiences and successfully hurdled the challenges NLC students face when pursuing their own higher education goals. This awareness makes them particularly perceptive in fulfilling the NLC mission to bring higher education to working men and women. As leaders—in the workplace, in unions, and in academics—the chief executive officers understand the demands of leadership in the global economy.

The president is supported by a senior staff of highly skilled and well qualified individuals who lead focused teams of individuals in fulfilling the goals and objectives specific to their areas:

- The vice president of academic affairs and provost leads the faculty and academic services staff, supervising all facets of teaching, experiential learning, and advising with the support of the Faculty Senate and committees.
- The executive vice president oversees human resources, accounting, conference services, and hospitality services; this team plans for and manages the physical components of the College, including financial

planning, housing and food, and sales and marketing of College conference services.

- The general counsel ensures that legal and regulatory requirements are met and works to build external relationships.

In 2007, with one president retiring, an acting president engaged in multiple functions, and a new president arriving, the College was in a period of administrative transition. President Schurman's ten years required her to straddle two worlds: she bridged distinctly different needs as the College evolved from training center roots that required hands-on director-level involvement into a higher education institution that demands intensive presidential-level external interaction. Her ability to adjust her leadership style as the institution advanced enabled the College to achieve its mission. During the interim leadership of Dr. Greenfield, the decision making process was collegial, as the acting president led by consensus.

Discussion

Current decision-making structures show strength in the reliance on consensus building, which reflects the collaborative nature of many higher education institutions. Rather than relying on top-down management structures, the administration looks to the talents of the faculty and staff for thoughtful, collegial decisions that reflect the mission of the College.

Key issues, particularly budget planning and limitations, are examined from a top-down perspective, as the College works towards a self-sustaining budget structure. However, once budgetary limitations are shared and recognized, considerations of needs are discussed and priorities are determined through consensus among top and mid-level administrators. As the College grows, new administrative and faculty positions are strategically added to fulfill these priorities, based on needs assessments from multiple viewpoints. This combination of recognizing limitations and building consensus about how best to work around them has enabled the College to manage growing pains.

However, as the College undergoes transition in its leadership, some strategic planning decisions have been delayed. Faced with challenges of daily growth, the administration is forced to manage day-to-day issues in key meetings, rather than focus on questions like the long-term direction of the College. While broad sketches have been laid out, the detailed examination of internal and external planning will need the direction of the new president.

Several concurrent processes enable the College to assess the effectiveness of administrative functions. Administrators gather, analyze, and apply the opinions of students and other guests through evaluations, comment cards, and reviews by group leaders. Secondly, top administrators have been developing work plans to conceptualize specific goals and objectives for each section and each position to enable thorough, goal-oriented performance appraisals of administrators and staff at all levels. Additionally, graduate surveys help administrators to gather key information about the support systems provided to students during and after their studies.

Besides the formal assessment processes, continuous informal evaluation of effectiveness takes place. Since the College is still quite small, with 60 full-time employees, reorganization

of administrative structures has often been immediate in recognition of specific College needs. For example, to extend the collegiate structure modeled by many institutions, the last major reorganization shifted registration and admissions from operations to Academic Services; this change resulted in a more cohesive student-oriented unit. A similar adjustment moved the experiential learning portfolio assessment process from a consultant to Academic Services to more effectively serve student advising needs.

Administrators understand the student body since most have long histories of involvement with the labor movement. Past restructuring has been effective in meeting student needs because of this connection. In the future, the College plans to approach reorganization plans from a more strategic point of view, as it moves towards the traditional collegiate model and applies examples offered through research of other institution's structures.

Current personnel work with dedication to fulfill the College's administrative needs; however, many individuals cover multiple roles, and the need for additional staff is recognized. Resources for critical positions have been invested, and the College has made many intermediate steps to develop an administrative structure similar to other colleges. In the past few years, essential staff members have been hired to build the College's administration according to the traditional collegiate model: the College hired a controller to manage the finances, a registrar to restructure the student information system, and a financial administrator to seek new student resources. Additionally, the College has expanded its development and marketing by appointing an assistant to the president for institutional advancement, which is currently vacant, and a director of communications. Filling these important roles has broadened the scope of the College's administration, allowing better fulfillment of the College's mission.

With just 12 administrators, clearly the College needs additional personnel to achieve its potential. Significant positions planned for in the future include a centralized information technology director to build connection among the College's information systems and a sales team for the Conference Services department to manage the exuberant growth of this division of the College. Additional support staff and mid-level professionals are also needed to fulfill projects in many areas of the College.

Despite limitations in staffing, and the challenges most College personnel face in managing multiple functions, the employees of the College work to promote the mission and growth of the institution. Limited human resources have at times resulted in negative impacts in terms of managing the demands of everyday tasks, and occasional inappropriate delays in processes have been stumbling blocks, but the College has worked within its financial constraints to manage these issues and seek solutions. For example, individuals volunteer for additional assignments and dedicate themselves to filling personnel gaps until funding allows for hiring additional staff. The staff is committed and believes in the College's mission, coming together to help solve problems and support one another; this is a key strength that has sustained the College through its continuous evolution. Additionally, the College has achieved an excellent blend of individuals with union backgrounds and those rooted in more traditional higher education experiences.

Fundamental Elements

Is the Chief Executive's Primary Responsibility to Lead the Institution Toward the Achievement of Its Goals and Is He Responsible for Administration?

The president of NLC is a member of the Board of Trustees and the chief executive officer of the organization. Section 15 of the Bylaws defines the authority and responsibility of the president.

Does the Chief Executive Have the Academic Background, Professional Training, and Other Qualities Appropriate to the Institution's Mission?

Before becoming NLC president in November 2007, Dr. William Scheuerman served from 1993 to 2007 as president of United University Professions (UUP), the largest public higher education union in the nation representing 33,000 academic and professional faculty, and an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). In July 2006, Dr. Scheuerman became the first AFT officer from higher education to serve on AFT's Executive Committee.

Dr. Scheuerman is the author of numerous scholarly works, including two books—*The Steel Crisis*, in 1986, and *Private Interests, Public Spending* with Sid Plotkin, in 1994, which examined the political origins of the fiscal crisis and organized labor's response. He serves on the boards of several public interest organizations and is a member of the editorial boards for AFT's *American Academic* journal and the journal *Working USA*. President Scheuerman earned his B.A. in Public Administration from the City College of New York, an M.A. in Political Science from Queens College and his Ph.D. in Political Science from the Graduate School of the City University of New York.

The past president was Susan J. Schurman, Ph. D.; she served the College from January 1997 to July 2007. Before becoming president of the NLC, she was director of the Labor Studies Center at the University of Michigan and director of the Labor Extension Program at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

Do the Administrative Leaders Have Appropriate Skills, Degrees, and Training to Carry out their Responsibilities and Functions?

Section 16 of the Bylaws creates the post of provost as chief academic officer of the institution. The current provost is Patricia Greenfield, Ph. D. Previously she was a distinguished member of the core faculty of the NLC. She is the former graduate program director of the Labor Relations and Research Center at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Dr. Greenfield is supported by two deputy provosts: Charles Hodell, Ph.D. coordinates registration, scheduling, advising, financial aid, and experiential learning assessment; and Yoon-il Auh, Ed.D. directs the online learning program.

Section 17 of the Bylaws establishes vice presidents of the College, as named by the president and approved by the Board of Trustees. Executive Vice President John Welsh currently provides day-to-day management of non-academic operations. He has served on the top administrative staff of both the Service Employees' International Union (SEIU) and the AFL-CIO and has considerable experience working with nonprofit organizations.

The administrative structure has continued to grow to help the president fulfill the College's mission. serves as Acting General Counsel James Gentile is responsible for charting the College's way through the increasingly complex legal and regulatory environment. He holds a B.A. in Philosophy and Government from Georgetown University and J.D. from Catholic University.

Is There a Qualified Staff Appropriate to the Goals, Type, Size, and Complexity of the Institution?

The administrative staff of the NLC is well qualified to fulfill the mission of the institution. The operational structure includes Deputy Executive Vice President and Director of Human Resources Beth Shannon, Director of Conference Services Lisa Hughes, Director of Hospitality Rick Matthews, and Controller Antonio DeNicolis. Academic Services offers the skills of Registrar Eve Dauer, Director of Admissions Karen Banks, and Financial Administrator Tracie Sumner.

Are There Adequate Information and Decision-Making Systems to Support the Work of Administrative Leaders?

Information exchange and decision-making are facilitated by regular meetings among involved personnel. The president, provost, executive vice president, and acting general counsel, meet weekly to review matters at the highest level. The operations administrators from several departments meet biweekly. The entire management team meets biweekly, and the faculty meets monthly. Other meetings are scheduled as needed to resolve particular areas of concern.

Is There Clear Documentation of Lines of Organization and Authority?

The current organizational chart documents organizational lines and authority.

Is There Periodic Assessment of the Effectiveness of Administrative Structures and Services?

The College has been undergoing rapid change and development in its administrative structures, creating new positions and procedures as required and in response to perceived needs. A formal assessment of administrative structures and services has begun with the development of work plans specific to each area, which will be coordinated with the developing strategic planning process.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Assess additional administrative needs according to the developing strategic plan.
2. Formalize the performance appraisal process.
3. Expand training opportunities for current staff and evaluate appropriate staffing needs.

Integrity

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.

Introduction

The National Labor College's mission is to serve the educational needs of working men and women. With a focus on educating union activists, the College aims to serve a nontraditional student population whose ethics are rooted in justice, equality, and solidarity. Integrity at the NLC reflects these ethics, as administrators, faculty, and staff strive to set and follow policies that show respect for diversity and human dignity. A central goal of the College is to protect the integrity of the labor movement.

The NLC is committed to honesty, ethical standards and conduct, and academic freedom. While the College is clearly rooted in the labor movement, students are required to question assumptions and to examine labor issues critically; all points of view are welcomed in discussions and written presentations. Many courses focus on labor issues, but instructors ensure that materials are presented objectively, so students can understand pertinent information and form independent views that result from their own critical analyses. Integrity is a central issue at the NLC in its efforts to broaden its audience and improve its reputation while promoting and protecting legitimate intellectual property rights.

Discussion

The NLC has made progress in sharing its goals to educate working people, and growth in the past decade has enhanced the College's reputation. Outreach has been planned and implemented in several orchestrated directions, as College administrators work with alumni, union partners, training centers, and other schools to share information about the College's dedication to the education of working people. Consequently, the reputation of the College has grown as more unionists and other workers learn about the programs available to help them earn degrees. Surveys have shown that individuals and organizations who are familiar with the College rate it highly as an academic institution.

Since the College is relatively unknown to many educators and potential students, efforts to build name recognition have expanded. As the College develops new academic partners and offers an expanded schedule of courses, information is shared accurately through numerous vehicles. The College website has evolved along with the College, and is currently undergoing a phased redesign that will be launched in 2008. Improvement of the physical campus of the College has also contributed to an enhanced reputation; the Kirkland Center offers new opportunities to host prestigious events like the AFL-CIO Global Organizing

Conference, which brought international labor leaders to campus in December 2007. With a showcase building and hospitable accommodations, the College has received more attention from the media, including praise for its efforts to educate nontraditional students.

The College continues to seek new avenues for sharing information about its mission. For example, *Within Your Reach*, the NLC's recruitment video was released in the fall of 2005. Besides winning the National Council of Marketing and Public Relations' Bronze Paragon Award, the video has helped the College reach a broader audience, as it encourages working people to renew their dreams of earning bachelor's degrees. Fulfillment of the promises that the video offers is truly within the reach of those who view the video. Available by request or through the College website, the video and other information is available to visitors to one of the numerous partner websites that offer web buttons connecting viewers to the College website. The video is also shown at exhibits and presentations to increase name recognition of the College.

A central component of the College's reputation is its commitment to strengthening the working class through education. When students arrive on campus or begin their online courses, they feel comfortable; they begin to feel that they belong in school and have the power to succeed—they realize that the NLC fulfills its promise to ensure that higher education is within their reach. While many schools, perhaps without even being aware, invest in a middle or upper class cultural sensibility, the NLC focuses on the needs and values of the working class; it has been successful with its students because faculty and staff understand who their students are and are able to help them maximize their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. Scholars have examined the crossover challenge for working-class students in the academy and the damage it often inflicts on students' sense of themselves and their ability to succeed as students. The NLC reframes the education as a working-class right rather than an unreachable privilege.

As a result of better communication of the College's mission, enrollment has grown. More graduates have continued their labor careers or invested in further education; many have published or lectured, sharing their experiences as NLC students, and enhancing the growing reputation of the College. Additionally, many go on to graduate school in programs offered on the George Meany Campus by other accredited institutions through special arrangements made by NLC.

Furthermore, the College's respect for its students and employees is reflected in its efforts to promote and protect their intellectual property rights and academic freedom. Since the cornerstone of the bachelor's degrees are the senior or capstone projects that lead students into original research projects, the College teaches students the fundamentals of research, documentation, and academic honesty while supporting students' choices to pursue relevant topics parallel to their own interests. Once students complete their projects, they may apply the ideas to their unions, present their results at conferences, or publish their work.

Since many courses require research or use of external sources in essays, the College also teaches students respect for academic honesty and the intellectual property rights of others. The College's policy on academic integrity is printed in the Student Handbook, and faculty enforce it through careful review of student papers. The policy represents standard academic language; a plan to revise the policy to clarify collaborative issues that are unique to the NLC

student's learning experiences is in progress. Furthermore, students' intellectual property rights are respected in all types of writing—essays are not shared without written permission from the student, and full attribution is presented.

In addition to establishing a safe intellectual environment for students, the College respects the intellectual property rights and academic freedom of its faculty and staff. Academic freedom is addressed specifically in Article 23 of the faculty contract, which states, "It is the policy of the College to maintain and encourage full freedom, within the law; of inquiry; teaching; research; publication." Original ideas presented by faculty members remain their intellectual property, whether presented orally in traditional class lectures or discussions or in written form in online courses.

Another area of intellectual property rights involves use of external materials in College courses. For materials to be copied and distributed to students, the administration requires permission from the publisher; this policy is reiterated each term when materials are requested. The fair use statute of copyright law allows use of materials for personal and educational purposes in certain situations, but responsibility for full understanding of the law lies with individual users. To clarify the law and strengthen the College's efforts to help students and employees follow the law, training on copyright issues has been proposed. Additionally, in the spring of 2008, the College hired the Missouri Book Store to coordinate course packets of copyrighted materials for appropriate distribution to students to consolidate the work of applying for reproduction permission.

To strengthen the College's stance on intellectual property rights, additional policies may be needed. While the rights of students and employees have been honored by the NLC, many schools have developed clearly delineated policies about intellectual property rights to ensure that creativity and research are protected. Some schools have appointed intellectual property rights advisory boards to guide their college community; the NLC's size does not warrant such a board, further expansion, however, may require review of this option.

Overall, NLC administrators and faculty invest thoughtful care into the development of policies that guide the integrity of the institution. Policies are readily available in print and electronic forms and are applied consistently and fairly. New policies are weighed carefully and discussed among all relevant parties. Every effort is made by faculty, administrators, and staff to retain the College's reputation while working to expand its audience.

Fundamental Elements

Are There Fair and Impartial Processes to Address Student Grievances, and Does the Institution Assure that Student Grievances Are Addressed Promptly, Appropriately, and Equitably?

The College has a published and functioning procedure for discrimination and harassment complaints. The Academic Review Committee is charged with considering student grievances over grades and appeals of academic misconduct against students.

Are the Practices for Hiring, Evaluating, and Dismissing Employees Fair and Impartial?

The rights of individual faculty members are protected through the collective bargaining agreement negotiated between the NLC and the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild, the faculty's chosen bargaining representative. The current collective bargaining agreement establishes procedures for the hiring, retention, and dismissal of faculty members. The collective bargaining agreement also establishes legal recourse to challenge administrative decisions that do not comply with the criteria and processes that are set forth.

Are there Sound Ethical Practices and Respect for Individuals in Teaching, Service, and Administrative Practice, Including the Avoidance of Conflict of Interest?

In the conduct of its educational programs and other activities, the NLC adheres to the highest ethical standards and consistently applies and follows its own stated policies, including its policies designed to protect intellectual freedom and academic integrity. The College's policies in this regard are all clearly set forth and widely disseminated. The Procurement Policy provides for safeguards against individual staff members acting in conflict of interest.

Is Treatment of Constituencies Equitable and Appropriately Consistent, as Evident in Such Areas as Student Discipline, Student Evaluation, Grievance Procedures, Faculty Promotion, Tenure, Retention and Compensation, Administrative Review, Curricular Improvement, and Institutional Governance and Management?

Formal processes for student grievances, faculty promotion, tenure retention, and compensation are all established. Faculty members exercise primary responsibility in matters of educational policy including the standards for teaching and scholarship and the filling of new and vacant positions.

Is There a Climate of Academic Inquiry and Engagement, Supported by Widely Disseminated Policies Regarding Academic and Intellectual Freedom?

The Board of Trustees adopted the NLC Policy on Academic Freedom in 1999 and similar language has been incorporated into Article 23 of the collective bargaining agreement between the college and the Newspaper Guild, which represents its faculty and professional employees. The policy, modeled on the widely used American Association of University Professionals (AAUP) language, broadly protects the rights of individual faculty to engage in vigorous and unfettered academic inquiry.

Is There an Institutional Commitment to Principles of Protecting Intellectual Property Rights?

The NLC Student Handbook sets forth the College's policy on academic integrity. The policy forbids individuals to misuse others' work or to use others' work without proper attribution.

Is There a Climate that Fosters Respect Among Students, Faculty, Staff and Administration for a Range of Backgrounds, Ideas, and Perspectives?

In the surveys of current students and alumni, the diversity of student backgrounds, and the climate of respect for this diversity on campus, was one of the most frequently remarked upon characteristics of the College. The College's practice and policies reinforce this

prevailing spirit of tolerance. The Student Handbook also contains campus policies on discrimination and harassment, Internet and computer usage, and drug and alcohol abuse. These policies are designed to protect students and employees from objectionable conduct, to instruct students as to the appropriate standards of conduct, and to establish fair procedures for the adjudication of grievances in regard to these matters.

Is There Honesty and Truthfulness in Public Relations Announcements, Advertisements, and Recruiting and Admissions Materials?

The NLC Course Catalog is updated each academic year to provide current and accurate information on a wide range of subjects. The updated version was thoroughly reviewed by the provost and deputy provost before publication. The website (www.nlc.edu) contains the material in the Student Handbook and is updated whenever changes are made. A faculty member ensures the site's continuing currency and accuracy. Care is taken in marketing graduate programs to ensure understanding that all master's programs are offered under the auspices of other institutions.

Is There Reasonable, Continuing Student Access to Paper or Electronic Catalogs?

The website provides continuing access to the Course Catalog. The printed version is also always available from Academic Services. Students are notified when publications are updated via email, the website, the online learning system, and/or the registration system.

Is Factual Information About the Institution Available, Accurately Reported and Made Publicly Available to the Institution's Community?

Middle States reports and other public documents related to the NLC are currently available upon request, and the College makes relevant documents available online to interested students and other parties.

Is Institutional Information Provided in a Manner that Ensures Student and Public Access, Such as Print, Electronic, or Video Presentation?

The Student Handbook and Course Catalog are available in both print and electronic media. Other policies and handouts are also printed and posted on the college's web site and provided to students on paper in orientation. The College video is available on the website.

Are all Applicable Standards, Reporting, and Other Requirements of the Commission Fulfilled?

All applicable standards for submitting progress reports and additional evidence have been followed by the NLC.

Is There Periodic Assessment of the Integrity Evidenced in Institutional Policies, Processes, Practices, and of the Manner in Which These Are Implemented?

The president and the administrative staff are constantly involved in supervising the implementation of policies and processes and assessing the integrity of the same. The anticipated formal strategic planning process should institutionalize these efforts. A review of the academic honesty policy is planned in 2008.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Create intellectual property rights policies that specify ownership of intellectual property rights and detail acceptable use of external source material.
2. Offer formal training on copyright law to ensure use of copyrighted materials follows copyright law.
3. Use an external permissions coordinator to manage copyright issues for supplemental course materials.
4. Examine the academic honesty policy to refine and clarify its application.

Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

Introduction

The new president's initial goal was to institute a process to update and revise the College's strategic plan for the. Measures for institutional assessment generally connect to a college's strategic plan, so the intention to redirect the College through a new strategic planning process resonates throughout the presentation of measures related to institutional assessment. While the previous strategic plan was generally considered a top-down strategy for moving the College forward, the new plan promises to be an inclusive and transparent process that intentionally programs in stakeholder participation. The transition from the first president to its current president has impacted many of the College function areas that require analysis to gain a sense of the institution's effectiveness; incremental changes occur almost daily as the College strives to fulfill its mission. However, the College currently meets the criteria of this standard and anticipates a future of extensive improvement driven by the developing strategic plan.

Discussion

Current techniques used to measure institutional processes are extensive across the multiple functions of the NLC and most work fairly well in keeping the College focused on its mission. Most areas of the College use tools to assess their effectiveness individually, but the College has not yet designed a comprehensive process for weaving the individual tools into an integrated strategic process with appropriate feedback loops and analyses which will exploit tangents and contradictions where these exist. In other words, these tools are not yet fully integrated to provide the College with a holistic view of institutional effectiveness. With plans in progress for developing a transparent strategic planning process, these individual measures will eventually unite and expand to create a fuller picture of the College, thus enabling it to better assess its programs, effectiveness, and gaps as a whole.

A key element of assessing the effectiveness of the College is the student course evaluation process. In week-in-residence and Union Skills courses, a student volunteer ensures the integrity of the evaluation process, passing out blank forms to class members and collecting and submitting the completed forms, which include both quantitative and qualitative questions. The results, which are compiled by support staff and presented to both the instructor and the provost, offer a snapshot of what students think about the course right after the week in residence is completed. Student perceptions of the week-in-residence and

Union Skills courses are also measured through personal interaction. The provost, deputy provost, and other faculty and staff are available, so students express their opinions, present any issues that are troubling them, and channel their comments and complaints. One goal to improve this aspect of assessment is to create more targeted questions, to link the questions more clearly to specific course and College objectives, to better codify and record personal interaction, and to systematize reporting on the outcomes of these meetings.

For the online courses, evaluation forms are completed in the final weeks of classes and are similarly compiled and shared. Instructor end-of-course surveys complement the student results by assessing the instructor's experience of the course, determining time and techniques invested, and seeking ideas for improvement. To address faculty technology challenges, faculty surveys of Blackboard training and help desk needs have been undertaken to pursue training that would enhance the online program. Under the auspices of the Distance Education Academic Steering Committee (DEASC), the results of the online student evaluations are compiled to provide across-class averages of responses along with individual course averages to help the committee make progress in its efforts to create quality control for the online program.

For example, by examining the number of hours students studied, faculty can make adjustments in reading and work assignments. Comparing these results to the time invested by faculty helps the committee assess time and resources required by the online program. Unfortunately, just 41 of 175 students responded to these surveys, and the committee is working to improve the response rate.

While the student evaluation results provide instructors and the provost details about specific problems with individual courses and give the instructor insights for improving the course, these results are not currently engaged by standing committees like the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committees to gain an overview of the academic program. To improve the effectiveness of the evaluation system, the College needs to systematize the evaluations to allow application to multiple areas.

Another issue of concern is that the student evaluation forms do not encourage students to respond in terms of the core competencies central to the College's mission. Building the section on course objectives to include the six competencies would make the student evaluations more effective in evaluating how the College fulfills its mission and the Learning Assessment Plan.

Beyond the student course evaluations, the Conference Services staff measures the College's effectiveness related to students' room and board during the week in residence. Comment cards are distributed in guest rooms, collected, and scrutinized by Conference Services staff to ensure that visitors have had a satisfactory experience at the College. Most responses are positive; problems and issues are addressed efficiently.

Meetings to discuss progress, problems, and plans are another key technique for institutional assessment at the NLC. The Board of Trustees meetings, which occur semiannually, assess the budgetary process, measure the effectiveness of expenditures, examine academic policies, and plan for College improvements. Weekly senior administrators meetings direct and plan for carrying out the Board of Trustees instructions and also serve to unify the results of

function area meetings and consider their impact on the College as a whole. Finally, most function areas at the College meet regularly to discuss achievements and address problems that interfere with institutional effectiveness.

At the function level, for example, the Accounts Receivable group meets to review accounts and reduce the receivable balance; the Library Committee examines student research needs, and the Archives Committee reviews the role of the archives in the student experience. In another area, the Enrollment Management Committee sets enrollment targets and assesses progress.

As reported at the most recent Board of Trustees meeting (February 2008), the 18 percent decrease in students enrolled from 2004-05 to 2005-06 resulted from changes of policy related to assessing credits. Significant recovery in 2006-07 came from investment of resources into developing new partnerships and promoting the College's message. In the 2007-08 academic year, enrollment numbers have been elevated by one half, indicating effective enrollment management strategies; new recruitment and communications strategies contribute to this change.

Like most colleges, the NLC examines graduation and retention rates to measure institutional effectiveness, and the function areas of admissions, registration, advising, and financial aid—all part of the Academic Services department reporting to the deputy provost—meet regularly to examine this data. The specialized nature of the institution makes it difficult to compare the NLC data to other schools: the national average is about six years from enrollment to graduation for a four-year college; however, as an upper-level, two-year institution exclusively serving working adults with union responsibilities and varying levels of pre-enrollment education, the time from matriculation to graduation varies. An analysis of the data on attempted versus earned credits reveals the following:

- For fiscal year 2004-05, 3,374 credits were attempted and 2,756 were achieved, an 82 percent success rate.
- For fiscal year 2005-06, 3,925 credits were attempted and 3,159 were achieved, an 80 percent success rate.
- For fiscal year 2006-07, 4,257.5 credits were attempted and 3,231 were achieved, a 76 percent success rate.

While the trend appears to be a decreasing success rate, as part of the mission to make education available to working adults, a built-in extension of one term gives students additional time to complete their work. Further extension may be requested, so that students are more likely to complete their coursework, particularly when they have met all attendance requirements and may need the additional time simply to complete final research projects.

Reviewing the results of the first required course, Educational Planning, which requires an extensive portfolio submission, revealed that of the 808 students enrolled in the course from fiscal year 2004-05 through 2007-08, 40 percent of students who enrolled in the course successfully completed the portfolio; 51 percent remained incomplete; 8 percent are currently enrolled (as of winter 2008). A recent reorganization of the portfolio review process has increased the rate of portfolio review, expanded the number of faculty trained to review portfolios, and gained new controls over the process.

Another facet of the Academic Services department that meets regularly is the faculty. Monthly faculty meetings, led by the provost and attended by the deputy provosts, create a forum where the faculty committees can report to the faculty as a whole. For example the Facilities Committee reports on efforts to improve the physical campus, which has most recently focused on improvements in the College bookstore. The Distance Education Academic Steering Committee (DEASC), which meets monthly to examine quality control issues in the online program, reports on efforts to develop the Online Quality Assurance Checklist, syllabus templates, and student and faculty manuals to help work towards establishing benchmarks and measuring progress.

The faculty meeting also addresses academic policies and evaluates effectiveness of current policy. For example, the February 2008 meeting reviewed credit hour limitations for students and ways to help students avoid credit overloads that may impact their learning and completion rates. The meetings also request reports from representatives from the Faculty Senate and the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committees. These groups are still evolving; as part of the institutional assessment structure, they are developing towards greater efficiency.

Overall, each function area within the College is analytically engaged in measuring their successes and setbacks, seeking improvements and solutions. Each area reports to the appropriate senior manager, who works to integrate each area's efforts into the global view gained by virtue of the senior position. Additionally, senior managers report to the president regularly and share their findings with the Board of Trustees, which assesses the College as a whole. Despite the challenges of having a strategic plan in progress, with function areas in transition, the College has managed to maintain a fair level of institutional assessment that will continue to grow and improve under the leadership of the new president and the direction of a strategic plan.

While numerous assessments and evaluations take place at the NLC, improvements need to be made in the integration of these processes. Discrete components are examined, but they are not consistently brought together to build across-the-board understanding, which inhibits their value individually. With progress on an institution-wide strategic planning and assessment process, the hoped for integration may be realized.

With a strategic planning process begun in early 2008, the NLC is moving towards a much improved system of overall institutional assessment that includes both qualitative and quantitative components. Additionally, many smaller steps have been taken to measure effectiveness throughout the institution, but they require strategic direction. At the heart of improving effectiveness is the question of resources: the College is limited both financially and in human capital. To increase enrollment and improve the College's ability to fully address its mission and goals, financial solutions need to be developed.

Working within current financial constraints, however, the key to improving institutional assessment is continued work within the six core competencies (leadership, critical thinking, effective communication, global thinking, information literacy, and technological proficiency) described in the Learning Assessment Plan. Analyzing the budget, making

staffing decisions, and prioritizing perceived needs must all contribute to enabling students to achieve these core competencies, which are directly derived from the College mission.

Direct measures of effectiveness in terms of these competencies can be achieved through the student evaluations. This qualitative and quantitative tool could be adjusted to gain insight on student's individual perceptions of their own achievements in these areas. In the 2008 Graduate Survey, respondents rated these skills as important to their post graduate lives in the following percentages:

- 93.6 percent rated leadership skills as being important or very important, and 79 percent of the respondents indicated that the NLC prepared them well in this area;
- 97.7 percent rated critical thinking skills as being important or very important, and 88.5 percent of the respondents indicated that the NLC prepared them well in this area;
- 97.7 percent rated communication skills as being important or very important, and 86.6 percent of the respondents indicated that the NLC prepared them well in this area;
- 85.3 percent rated data analysis skills as being important or very important, and 80.4 percent of the respondents indicated that the NLC prepared them well in this area;
- 83.7 percent rated technology skills as being important or very important, and 68.7 percent of the respondents indicated that the NLC prepared them well in this area.

These results suggest that the competencies, overall, are important to NLC graduates, and that the majority found that the NLC prepared them well in these areas. However, improving effectiveness in these areas is still important. By examining the results of students' evaluations of their progress in these areas on a course-by-course basis, combined with continued program analysis, within the guiding structure of a strategic plan, the College may be able to enhance its contributions to students' growth before degree completion is reached.

Fundamental Elements

Is There an Appropriate Institutional Assessment Plan?

Although a formal institutional assessment plan is not currently in place, the Learning Assessment Plan and the Budget Report together ensure the application of the College's mission within the financial limitations of the College. The Board of Trustees reviews the College's effectiveness semiannually through reports provided by senior management. Individual function areas meet regularly to assess progress and setbacks and to sharpen strategies to achieve goals. As the College undergoes a presidential transition, institutional assessment is adequate but needs to be governed by the in-progress strategic plan.

While multiple qualitative and quantitative measures are in place, the institution needs to maximize the use of the existing data and information. An office or committee on institutional assessment should be established to ensure the following:

- that the College is using various methods to measure its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission;
- that the information is shared among the various departments on campus;
- that assessment information is readily accessible to faculty, students, and administrative staff.

Although there is collaboration among faculty and administration (e.g., faculty, enrollment, and facilities meetings), and efforts to support the faculty (e.g., professional development), assessment of the support and collaboration of faculty and administration needs to be enhanced. Periodic assessment of the faculty should be instituted to determine their overall satisfaction with the NLC as a whole. Although the aforementioned collaborated meetings take place and faculty may readily express their views, there is no formal process for determining faculty views of the level of support received or the effectiveness of the overall collaboration of faculty and administration.

Are Assessment Results Used to Improve and Gain Efficiencies in Administrative Services and Processes?

Assessment results are used to improve and gain efficiency in administrative services and processes. Engaging evaluation questionnaires, both the academic and conference services components of the College collect data, analyze it, and apply it to making improvements throughout the College.

Although assessment results are shared and discussed with the appropriate constituents on some occasions, it has not reached the point where it has become a systematic and fundamental part of the College. The strategic plan under the new president will help to make this a regularly administered essential activity in the life of the NLC.

Is There a Written Institutional (Strategic) Plan that Reflects Consideration of Data from Assessment?

Currently a strategic planning process has begun; the intention is to develop a strategic plan that reflects consideration of data from the ongoing assessment of institutional effectiveness.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Follow through on a continuous process of planning and assessment to ensure that periodic evaluation of effectiveness takes place.
2. Integrate and systematize current institutional assessment functions.

Student Admissions and Retention

The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals and abilities are congruent with its mission.

Introduction

Since the NLC achieved full accreditation in 2004, it has invested extensively in improving student admissions and retention. By recruiting and hiring a registrar, registrar's assistant, and a financial administrator and promoting a long-time staff member to the position of director of admissions, and complementing these positions with the purchase of a student information system, the College has increased admissions and worked more efficiently to retain students. Additionally, by implementing a pre-admissions advising system that relies on the expertise of faculty to direct students to appropriate course selections, the College has experienced a higher student success rate. Finally, the Enrollment Management Committee that includes senior-level administrators allows the College to plan clearly and address issues and develop strategies to engage the new student information system and expand enrollment.

Discussion

An open and rolling admissions policy serves the goals and mission of the College well. With a mission to serve the higher education needs of working men and women, allowing students to begin at any point in the academic year is a policy that helps students attend college when it best fits their individual schedules. The policy on per-credit enrollment costs, which allows union members to enroll at a significantly reduced price, is another way that the College enhances its ability to extend educational opportunity to working people. AFL-CIO affiliated unions enroll at \$158 per credit hour; the cost per credit hour for non AFL-CIO affiliated union members is \$210; for non-union members, the per-credit cost is \$1,031.

To help students understand how they fit into the degree program, the admissions process includes pre-admissions advising. In extensive discussions with a central faculty member, students can begin to understand how previous learning experiences may contribute towards a four-year degree. In most cases, the advising session allows the advisor to ascertain if the student has enough credits for full admission: 56 credit hours are required for the Bachelor of Arts program or 45 credit hours for the Bachelor of Technical/Professional Studies (BTPS).

The pre-admission process allows the College to work with individual students to design a course of study that can combine NLC courses with enrollment at their local community college or university and creates another option for fulfilling the College mission.

Additionally, non-degree seeking students are welcome to take courses without completing the admissions process.

Another aspect of the admissions policy that supports the mission of the College is the transfer credit policy. By allowing up to 90 transfer credits, the College fulfills its role as a degree-completion institution, helping students who have been engaged in lifelong learning to connect all of their experiences towards earning an NLC degree. An important part of this policy is the experiential learning program, which allows students to prepare experiential learning portfolios that may be assessed for up to 30 credits; by honoring the learning that takes place in unions and on the job, the College further supports the education of working men and women. The College also accepts union apprenticeship credits that are formally assessed by the American Council on Education, College Level Examination Program results, and military training and service credits.

Since each term features new students, the College invests staff time into orientation that helps students acclimate to campus life and to understand their roles and responsibilities during the week in residence and the online portions of the courses. For online students, a detailed student manual and orientation within individual courses achieve the same student success goals. Early in their enrollment, students are assigned to specific advisors to help them develop long-term advisor/advisee relationships that promote success and sensible enrollment choices.

One aspect of the admissions policy that is still in development is the technology and writing review. Like many colleges, the NLC would like to assess student skills at the outset to determine which students will need additional help. The requirement for students to complete a technology review and submit a guided writing sample has not yet been implemented as a result of staff and faculty limitations in terms of completing full reviews. The new SunGard student information system is designed to manage this admissions function, and staff training in early 2008 began to expand the software's reporting and information management functions. As the student information system's capability grows, the possibilities for this review may be re-examined. The goal of the review is to find out which students need early technology and writing support; an important analysis for a distance leaning and writing intensive program. Better support in these areas may enhance the College's retention and completion rates.

Another area of continued growth that still needs clarification and development is the financial aid process. The NLC has pursued federal financial aid eligibility and has been working to meet all federal requirements. During this process, the NLC revisited admissions policies and worked towards a coordinated presentation of federal and institutional financial aid to students in the fall of 2008. Once this is established, and an analysis of the many highly targeted scholarship funds is undertaken, the goal is to offer students financial aid reports at the beginning of each term.

With the hiring of an experienced financial administrator, the College has taken a major step towards providing financial aid information to eligible students while ensuring that awards are equitable and reasonable. The numerous small, targeted scholarships are in the process of being re-examined for more streamlined and beneficial system for awards, eligibility requirements, evaluations, and notifications.

Some of the scholarships currently in place are handled by endowments; others, like the Union Plus NLC Scholarship, set out a specific amount of funding each year. The Union Plus Scholarship awards \$25,000 each year to students who are dues paying members of an AFL-CIO union.

Another type of scholarship specifies the field of study: the AETNA Healthcare Scholarships for Minority Students in the labor movement fund students specializing in health and safety courses. Additionally, in May 2007 the Kaiser Permanente and the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions established the Kaiser Permanente Healthcare Institute to educate safety and health students. The \$450,000 (across three years) will be used to develop new courses and to sponsor conferences on health care issues.

The College offers students a mix of loan options along with payment plans to help them stay in school and meet their financial obligations, which is often a deciding factor in continued enrollment. Additional progress includes efforts to establish across-the-board rules for scholarships to ensure that awards are fair and reasonable.

Efforts to coordinate recruiting and admissions have been successful and system wide. Since July 2005, the College has maintained systematic oversight of student recruitment and admissions through its Enrollment Management Committee (EMC). In a shift towards a new strategic approach, beginning in 2008, the deputy provost redirected the EMC, and a redesign of the enrollment management process is in progress.

In biweekly meetings, the EMC has worked to coordinate marketing, recruitment, and admissions, ensuring that all three areas work together to maximize limited resources. Under this structure, the three units are able to understand their specific needs and devise, coordinate, and implement appropriate policy solutions to create desired outcomes. Ongoing oversight, involving coordination, cooperation, and communication among units, facilitates the strategic targeting of resources to degree areas and the Union Skills Program as they are needed. Through the application of this approach, the College has effectively institutionalized its goal of providing for an adequate recruitment and admissions process starting with the point of initial inquiry to matriculation.

The effectiveness of the EMC is evident in the fact that in the six-month to one-year period following its establishment, enrollment at the NLC has consistently increased each semester. The committee was established in 2005, and enrollment reports reveal the following credit hours per fiscal year:

- For fiscal year 2005-06 3,925 credit hours;
- For fiscal year 2006-07 4,257.5 credit hours; and
- For fiscal year 2007-08 (as of winter term) 2,433.5 credit hours.

Before the adoption of the SunGard campus information system in 2007, the College relied upon the FoxPro-based RIAS information system, which permitted a fair degree of data reporting on trends in current and future enrollments. The new SunGard student information system provides the College with the ability to develop a highly sophisticated level of data reporting on projected enrollments and degree completion and is currently

being implemented to cover all phases of academic administration and planning. Both financial and staff resources have been heavily invested into this new system; training opportunities have been available to address the challenges of learning to manage its possibilities, despite requiring a longer time frame than originally anticipated.

Beyond the use of the new student information system, review of student credit load in comparison to success rates receives ongoing attention in faculty meetings. In an effort to monitor student success and completion rates, the Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy states that students must complete at least two-thirds of the courses attempted; incompletes are counted as unsuccessful attempts. Students are also required to achieve and maintain at least a 2.0 grade point average. Having these policies in place help the College encourage students to move forward with their coursework while maintaining reasonable workloads.

Current measures to track individual academic progress and retention have proven effective, as enrollment continues to grow. Overall, the SunGard student information system should prove to more capably track and report on student progress and enable more consistent follow up procedures to improve retention. With new procedures in place for advising and continued training, the system has the potential to be an outstanding resource to promote better tracking of student progress and retention.

Additionally, over the last 18 months, the College substantially improved upon its ongoing efforts to monitor and guide student academic progress and retention by further formalizing and expanding its student advising system. Through the Academic Services Department, the College provides both pre-admissions advising and ongoing systematic degree program advising for all admitted students. The advising process has changed to a student-centered approach, revising the week-in-residence advising system and addressing the challenges of advising students in the fully online courses. Further, the new process addresses advising needs in the very beginning of the student's matriculations process.

Established in the fall of 2006, the new student advising system begins with pre-admissions counseling and advising. Prospective student telephone and email inquiries concerning NLC programs are logged and tracked to ensure systematic and timely follow-up in the form of pre-admission screening and counseling to determine which program best suits each student's academic and professional interests, needs, and goals. The advising program is supported by an advising hotline: a toll-free number and advising email address to help students get the advising support they need. The phone system in Academic Services lights up appropriately to alert faculty and staff to these special calls, and the department tries to return calls within one working day. By providing these safety nets, the advising program attempts to support students and potential applicants.

Once admitted to the College, all students meet with their assigned faculty advisors during the week-in-residence (or through an online/telephone arrangement) to review academic progress and to select courses required to fulfill degree plan requirements. Every effort is made to provide students with consistent advisors. Students receive additional advice on their degree plans, semester course loads, and, when needed, any supplementary off-campus courses (such as general education credits) outside of the week-in-residence through telephone and email communications. Additionally, each faculty advisor receives a full academic portfolio or student advising file for their advisees. Advising helps ease

matriculating students' initial college experience and affords returning students additional advising opportunities to plan their degree progress.

Before the new advising system was established, online students often were not receiving the advising they needed. While this is still a struggle, as students shift degree programs and courses of study, the current system offers extensive follow up and email/phone advising sessions to ensure that most online students receive the support they need.

To systematize the advising process, in 2007 the Academic Services Department produced and distributed to faculty and staff a Student Advising Manual in loose-leaf notebook format, which allows supplementary and updated materials to be inserted periodically. Updates are usually scheduled for several weeks before the week in residence; this timing apprises advisors of changes and additions and helps them prepare for the upcoming one-on-one advising sessions.

The College has promoted student retention through its Alumni Mentorship program. Incoming students have full online access (via the College's website) to a list of alumni volunteers who provide them with first-hand experience of what to expect during their first semester, and to answer concerns about the crucial issue of balancing course loads and family life with the pressures of academic course work. This aspect of the College's student retention program is especially valuable given that an overwhelming number of NLC students are working adults who serve in full-time career staff and elected union positions. Learning how their peers simultaneously managed to maintain job and family responsibilities and earn their degree serves to bolster students' confidence and persistence required for academic success in higher education.

However, the program is currently undergoing a re-examination, and Academic Services is planning to work with the alumni to revise this system. A training and orientation program, along with plans to promote its availability, are scheduled for June 2008.

The College should consider a variety of policies and programs to involve all stakeholders in the College community to increase rates of student retention. Currently in discussion is the possibility of placement and diagnostic testing of writing and technology skills. Another key practice is the development of partnership agreements with unions to establish plans to make education more available to their members.

Over the last year, the College has drafted two forms of potential admissions assessment tools: an online computer skills assessment and a writing skills assessment. Despite the wide-scale use of personal computers in society in recent years, many adult learners often find themselves lacking familiarity with certain program applications used in higher education. Recognition of this situation led the College to create a basic computer skills assessment tool to be required of all incoming students. Given the distance learning format of the College, such assessment remains critical.

Likewise, a number of students, while often proficient in forms of written expression routinely required in the office, were found to be in need of substantially upgrading their academic writing skills. This discovery led the College to explore means of assessment to place these students into course work after admission in order to adequately prepare them

for the writing requirements of the degree program. The writing assessment seems especially important in light of the fact that as an undergraduate liberal arts and distance program, the degree courses require an extraordinary amount of written work. Students who find themselves inadequately prepared for the rigors of producing written evidence of their scholarly achievement are likely to not persist, or, at a minimum, undergo an inordinate loss of time in pursuit of their degree goals due to insufficient readiness. While the College continues to provide courses for students needing to upgrade their writing skills, it would better serve the student's academic goals and the College's interests in retention to utilize admission-level skills assessments.

Both of these assessment tools are viewed by the College as placement mechanisms, not as barriers to admission, and as such, they can be seen as fully consistent with its open admissions philosophy, since they serve as course placement tools to ensure students are adequately prepared for success in their chosen program of course work. Given the likely benefits of each of these assessments (at the admission stage) on student retention, the College is examining the implementation possibilities for the assessments as soon as it is practical.

Additionally, the College relies on union partners for supplemental mentoring. Several union affiliates send their students to the College as cohorts. A number of these affiliates have staff that help to introduce and guide these cohort students through the process of admission. They also offer peer counseling and encouragement as these cohorts pursue their course work, along with the support system that the students build for one another. Some unionists acting in this capacity are themselves NLC graduates, so they offer students the benefit of gaining immediate knowledge of what it is like to return to college after many years away from academic pursuits.

One example is the partnership between the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) and the NLC. By hosting weeks in residence of three classes, two required courses, Educational Planning and Introduction to Labor Studies, along with Reading and Writing Critically, the IAMAW educational department has helped numerous members move successfully towards graduation. Beginning in 2004, two cohorts per year enrolled in the three courses; some students were able to continue directly to the senior block; others spend several terms fulfilling their requirements. As interest from the IAMAW membership grew, the program was offered three times a year, beginning in 2007. When the IAMAW found that many students still needed other general education requirements, in the fall of 2007 it established a week-in-residence focused on math, science, and humanities requirements, which will be offered as needed.

In addition to offering its southern Maryland training center to host these courses, the IAMAW also supports the students through their faculty and staff. Introduction to Labor Studies is taught by IAMAW faculty, and the IAMAW staff recruits and tracks students' enrollment and success. The College should consider expanding union staff mentorship where cohort systems of matriculation.

Many other unions participate in the NLC degree program, and the College remains committed to working with unions individually to design the most useful programs. For example, the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers

(IIATF) has held week-long apprenticeship instructor's program for four years, featuring courses from the Union Skills program, and adding core NLC requirements to the summer 2008 program. Other unions, like the Sheetmetal Workers International Association (SMWIA) and the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry (UA) offer courses throughout the year.

Fundamental Elements

Does the Admissions Policy Support and Reflect the Mission of the Institution?

The NLC admissions policy fully supports and reflects its mission. The College mission to serve working people's educational needs is reflected in a rolling admissions policy that allows students to enroll in the term and type of program that works best. With a combination of week-in-residence, online, and Union Skills offering throughout the year, students can move forward in the program at their own pace.

Are the Admissions Policy and Criteria Available to Assist the Prospective Student in Making Informed Decisions?

The NLC admissions policy and criteria are clearly spelled out in the College Course Catalog. Additional details are available on the website. Students who have questions can call Academic Services for guidance or use the toll free advising number or email account to get needed information or explanation.

Is There Accurate and Comprehensive Information Regarding Academic Programs, Including any Required Testing?

Accurate and comprehensive information is available to students and other interested parties in both the printed Course Catalog and on the website. Additional flyers and brochures are also prepared and distributed during the week in residence and in orientation materials, and new students discuss their enrollment options with the College's pre-advising counselor or other staff and faculty.

Currently a testing program is not in place, though discussion is in progress regarding a writing and technology assessment. If this policy goes into effect, students will be notified through the new SunGard system, which has the capability to track the details of admissions applications.

Information about the Bachelor of Arts Program, the Bachelor of Technical/Professional Studies Program, and the Union Skills Program is readily available in the College Course Catalog; it is updated regularly and reviewed for consistency by the coordinators for each program. Further details of the majors, concentrations, and certificates available are also described in detail. The Course Catalog is available in both printed version and through the College website.

Is Information on Student Learning Outcomes Available to Prospective Students?

Many students find out about the NLC through union friends and families, so many are acquainted with the learning opportunities and the results of earning degrees at the College. The College website also offers details about learning outcomes; for example, in the

Prospective Students section, links are offered to help students learn more. First, the College video *Within Your Reach*, offers stories from students and graduates. Next, a link to the essay “Degrees of Success,” from the AFL-CIO America at Work project, which features the success stories of numerous graduates, including several union presidents. In the February 2008 NLC Update, student and graduate stories also gained attention.

While student success stories are readily available, additional effort to share the results of graduate surveys should be made to reveal to students that their predecessors in the program have gone on to new careers, and to graduate and law school.

Is There Available, Accurate and Comprehensive Information, and Advice Regarding Financial Aid, Scholarships, and Refunds?

The NLC is currently pursuing approval to offer federal financial aid. When federal financial aid becomes available, the College plans to offer students complete financial packages with scholarships, loans, and/or payment programs at the beginning of their enrollment. Currently, several scholarship programs have been established; plans for additional analysis and potential consolidation are currently in progress.

Are There Published and Implemented Policies and Procedures Regarding Transfer Credit and Credit for Experiential Learning?

Clear policies and procedures for both transfer credit and experiential learning credits are published in the College Course Catalog and on the website. Since Educational Planning is the first required class, students gain additional information and instruction in the portfolio development materials provided in class. The course also guides students through requests for transcripts from other institutions and training centers.

The NLC follows stated policies that limit experiential learning credits to 30 credits that must be analyzed and documented in the completed Educational Planning Portfolios that the majority of students submit. Details about general education requirements are also fully explained in both the materials and in pre-advising and advising sessions with administrators and faculty.

Is There Ongoing Assessment of Student Success that Evaluates the Match Between the Attributes of Admitted Students and the Institution’s Mission and Programs?

According to the 2008 Graduate Survey, a survey of graduates from 2004 to 2008, admitted students were good matches for admission to the NLC. After completing their degrees,

- 21.9 percent of students indicated that they were accepted to graduate school, and 2.3 percent were accepted to law school; 57 percent are considering further education;
- 59.7 percent noted that their NLC degrees enabled them to serve the labor movement more effectively, and
- 57.4 percent noted that they pursued their degrees for personal fulfillment.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Overhaul and streamline the financial aid system.

2. Implement the technology and writing sample review as stated in the admissions policy.
3. Encourage the expansion of the alumni mentoring program by providing more training to volunteers and increasing efforts to promote and publicize it among current students.

Student Support Services

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

Introduction

With a focus on nontraditional students, the NLC's student support services are uniquely crafted to meet the needs of students enrolled in the week-in-residence courses, fully online classes, and the Union Skills program. Since NLC students are on campus for intense but short weeks in residence, in-person support needs are greatly in demand during those weeks, but most support is offered at a distance. All degree courses require extensive online work, so support services, particularly in terms of helping students use the online learning system and access the student information system, are important to student success.

During weeks-in-residence, the NLC offers support comparable to many colleges of its size. The NLC Academic Services staff and faculty offer week-in-residence advising and degree planning, orientation, a welcome luncheon, a student-faculty forum, social opportunities, worker memorial services and activities, graduation meetings, library tours, registration for the next term, and learning and information systems training to set the stage for continued telephone and online support when the students are working at a distance. Students, faculty, and administrators focus on building relationships that will support students and ensure their success. For example, a student with unusual transfer credit issues can work with the registrar to ensure the appropriate credits are applied; a student planning a double major can meet with the deputy provost to plan out a strategy for success; a student having trouble with writing essays can work with faculty to analyze and overcome the challenge. Throughout the week in residence, faculty, staff, and administrators offer students their time from early in the morning to late at night (some even live on campus that week) to support students through a stressful, challenging, yet exciting week of study.

When students are not on campus, they receive support at a distance, and the NLC has established policies and procedures to ensure that students feel connected to the College even when, as is the case with many online students, they never set foot on campus. Distance support services include a comprehensive website, an online learning system (Blackboard), an Internet accessible student information system (IQWeb), online library services, an Internet bookstore, and open learning courses. Additionally, faculty and staff are available by telephone, fax, and email to help students as issues arise.

Some students prefer to help themselves to the array of services, so the College has designed and maintained online systems that enable these students to find what they need to resolve questions and move on with their work. Other students prefer to call the College and find more direct support. For instance, students who have questions about registration deadlines and tuition due dates might look on the website, the student information system, or the learning software to uncover answers independently, or they might email the registration

staff or their advisors, or they might call directly with their questions. Similarly, new students, who receive their learning system (Blackboard) login information through email or mail, can approach the software by simply reading the directions or viewing one of the many customized tutorials for NLC students—or, they can contact the Blackboard support specialist (or a professor or staff member) and receive a personalized walkthrough to help them access the system. Since many of NLC's students use computers for the first time as a result of enrolling, many need special help, and the College customizes support to the needs of the individual students.

Support services are not simply student initiated—contact and follow up is instigated by College representatives to ensure that students get the help they may not realize they need. Registration deadline reminders, policy changes, and scholarship information, for example, are regularly sent to students by mail and email. Course lists are scrutinized to ensure students have not enrolled in courses that do not fit their academic needs. Faculty members contact students who seem to have disappeared from courses (like those who do not submit assignments or post to the discussion board online) to uncover the problem, which might be as simple as inability to login because of a forgotten password or as complex as a misunderstanding about College expectations for students. Proactive support plays a major part in NLC students' success.

Discussion

Currently, the NLC's efforts to provide support services to its students have been highly effective. Key improvements were initiated by the purchase and implementation of a new student information system. With an Internet component called IQWeb, the system allows students to view their transcripts, register for courses, and pay their bills. Additionally faculty can quickly post grades and access details about students for advising. With the College website; IQWeb; Blackboard, the online learning system; and the library search engines, the College has set up a solid support system for its distance students. On campus, services expand to include housing, training, and in-person enhancements to online services like advising and orientation.

Admissions, registration, and advising support intertwine at the NLC, since most applicants almost immediately enroll in courses. With the new information system, students can apply for admission and register online, allowing staff more time to respond to inquiries. Since the College pulls together students' experiences into a cohesive degree, extensive time is invested in working with students' transfer information—many students have numerous records that require careful review and input into the student information system. Concurrently, the College's pre-admissions advisor contacts students directly to help them determine if their educational needs fit the NLC program and then create an initial degree plan and set goals for success. Once students have been accepted and enrolled, advising continues to ensure students move forward successfully and make appropriate course selections. Degree counseling is often intensive, as students need help understanding degree and major requirements and how their transfer credits and partnership courses fit into their degrees. Currently, the administration is examining options to increase student access to support services by extending office hours. However, other types of counseling, like mental health or career, are not formally available.

Financial aid support is becoming more effective with the introduction of a new financial administrator. While the Academic Services department is thinly staffed, the administrators work with staff and all are committed to responding as effectively as possible to student needs. Everyday issues like billing and payment are handled efficiently: Staff members respond as quickly as possible to inquiries about student accounts. Another challenge is to keeping students informed about current and new procedures, and the new SunGard system has the potential to help. Since many students' tuition is paid by third parties, staff are careful to retain written records to avoid misunderstandings. Additionally, new resources to help students gain funding are being explored. Scholarships have been developed and offered and federal funding options were established in early 2008. When students are not able to obtain funding, the NLC has other options to ease the cost of enrollment: a mix of loan options became available in 2008 to help students stay in school and meet their financial obligations.

Another aspect of student support services is orientation. With its unique structure and rolling admissions policy, the College needs a variety of means to offer orientation. Orientation begins when new students receive their course confirmation and login information: clearly written instructions guide students to their online classrooms while sharing information about College services and programs. Most courses also offer orientation materials to help students move forward quickly in both the class and their access to College services, and the College website presents comprehensive details. Additionally, orientation and help materials are available on Blackboard: each online course includes a built-in orientation section, and many courses present orientation announcements and surveys or quizzes to ensure students understand how to use the course materials. On campus, a special orientation session is held for all new students at the beginning of a week-in-residence. To ensure that returning students understand their roles and responsibilities and the College's, a welcome luncheon reviews key information for both new and returning students. Formerly a Sunday night dinner, administrators shifted this function to lunch time to accommodate commuters.

The quality of campus life has been highly rated by students. Housing includes well appointed rooms with hotel comforts, and the dining services are excellent. Students feel comfortable on campus, and security guards ensure the safety of all. The social aspects of campus life are also valuable: students socialize during meals and breaks and relax together in a lounge with televisions, game equipment, and snacks and beverages; a fitness center and extensive acreage allow students to exercise and reduce stress. As at most colleges, intense friendships are formed and support networks develop. The Student Alumni Association helps extend and support these relationships.

During a week-in-residence, the Student-Faculty Forum presents an opportunity for the whole College to come together and discuss a pertinent issue. In 2008, the winter session united environmental and labor issues in an exciting discussion. In the past, the forum featured debates about the Iraq War, the labor movement in China, and patriotism and the labor movement. The gathering offers students, faculty, staff, and guests the opportunity to listen to experts on the issues and voice questions and opinions. Visits to Mother Jones' local memorial, ceremonies to honor unionists' achievements, dedications, and other events are also held during the week in residence whenever possible.

Partnership agreements further extend the services offered to NLC students. Union partnerships offer students the opportunity to enroll in courses through their individual unions and enter the NLC program with a cohort of classmates that builds a solid support network among students. The services offered by partners match the high quality of the NLC support services, and representatives meet regularly to discuss improvement options. In most cases, NLC courses are taught by the College faculty or by approved union representatives. For example, in the partnership with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW), core NLC courses are offered by full-time or adjunct faculty at the IAMAW training center; this enables students to begin the challenging educational process in a familiar location. These cohorts have been highly successful, and students inspire one another to succeed and move forward by enrolling for additional terms at the NLC campus. Courses offered directly by academic partners are carefully reviewed by NLC administrators and faculty to ensure quality and that they appropriately fit with the NLC degree program. All partnership courses have been approved by the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

Additionally, academic partnerships with institutions like Cornell University, University of Illinois, and University of Kentucky, and others, allow students to enroll in quality courses closer to home. While the NLC has no oversight of these established institutions' support services, articulated partnership agreements ensure that all institutions meet their accreditation requirements. For both types of partnerships, individuals who teach NLC courses, particularly Educational Planning, undergo rigorous and complete training.

Although problems resulted from implementation of the new SunGard student information system, staff have worked hard to learn the program's capabilities and to make the conversion as seamless as possible for students. The new system offers numerous advantages, but, as with any new information system, glitches still need to be resolved. Sometimes problems result from user errors, so the College plans to offer training to students during the week in residence and offer an online tutorial for distance students along with additional training for staff and faculty use.

The College has other areas to address that at times are problematic. The student identification card system malfunction, for example, was a complaint for many students at the winter 2008 week in residence, and the College still struggles with providing ID cards to online students. Additionally, the College needs to examine mental health support services for week-in-residence students. And, while security policies have been developed, the College still needs to develop emergency policies and procedures.

As the College expands its fully online class offerings, changes have been envisioned in the role of support services, and preliminary modifications have been implemented. Key aspects of online support services include a distance learning website, a help desk and extensive online tutorials and guidebooks, online library access, open learning courses to allow for experimentation before enrollment, and orientation materials. Plans for extending this support involve additional research and analysis of the student population's needs through surveys and committee work, the recreation of the physical campus as an e-campus, an online writing lab, and a training and networking program for faculty and staff.

The distance learning website, part of the comprehensive NLC website, offers students a starting point to explore the online program. In addition to explaining eligibility, the site links students to questionnaires that help them determine if pursuing an online degree is the right decision. Requirements for the BTPS are presented, along with links to the College Course Catalog and registration system.

A central aspect of online support services is the help desk feature offered by many schools: although just one contractual staff member staffs this desk, responses indicate that the help desk works well; even though the College does not offer around-the-clock help desk availability, prompt business-hour responses combined with electronic manuals and customized self-directed tutorials meet students' needs. Currently, the help desk responds to 5-10 calls/emails in regular weeks, which may grow to as many as 100 calls/emails in the first weeks of classes. The response time is short: if a call is not immediately answered, students rarely wait more than a few hours to have their questions addressed.

Additionally, online students have access to the NLC library. Students can access holdings through an online card catalog and numerous search databases are available, including the EBSCOHost Research Database and the Maryland Digital Library. Tutorials help students use these resources effectively, and library staff are available to answer questions. Interlibrary loan services help students get the books and resources they need, even at a distance.

A fourth area of support for online programs consists of the Open Learning Courses, a unique feature at the NLC. Established online courses have been encapsulated into brief, self-directed courses accessible to students and to the entire Internet community. One goal of the Open Learning Courses is to offer samples of labor-oriented courses to help current students decide what to take. Additionally, their goal is to capture the attention of the broader community, engage their interest, educate them about labor's role in the world, and lead them to enrollment at the NLC, if appropriate.

The NLC online program also supports students through solid orientation materials. Each online class features an "NLC—What's What" button that links students to support services. Included are the Online Student Handbook, which lays out responsibilities and policies for students, faculty, and the College; technical support links; online study aids; links to the library and bookstore; and the College Course Catalog. Most courses also include orientation materials pertinent to the specific class.

Plans for supporting online students are extensive; the deputy provost for online learning has developed both immediate and long-range plans for improving services. Currently, he is working to establish procedures to further analyze and measure the population of nontraditional students who would benefit from the program. Work has begun with surveys to measure the population and its perceived needs while evaluating College support services; end-of-course surveys are one aspect of this effort. Since nontraditional students support services often require more time and other resources, plans are under way to establish milestones and caps to ensure the most cost effective means to further support students. This analysis will yield information to improve the support currently offered.

Additionally, two committees are being established to guide the growth and development of the online program. The Distance Education Steering Committee works to establish

teaching and support quality benchmarks, quality control of online courses, training for faculty and staff, and additional strategies for student assessment. The Distance Education Operational Planning Committee's goals are to identify optimum learning and teaching support systems and identify best practices and participation to increase online enrollment. Both committees aim to encourage managed growth that maintains the personal quality of current student support.

As the online program grows, the College has expanded its online library services. Additionally, an Online Writing Lab is under consideration. Initially, the lab will offer handouts and tutorials along with a discussion board to address specific student questions. As resources allow, a live chat room may be added, where students will gain synchronous access to feedback and revision advice.

Finally, the online program hopes to build a budget for research and development that will help faculty and staff better serve students. Online programs have burgeoned across the country, and teaching strategies, ways to engage the learning software, and new ways to support students have been developed. Attending conferences and networking will enable NLC representatives to learn from others and improve the current program. Additionally, part of this program will establish a recognition system for excellence in teaching online, which is a proposed part of the tenure process. Currently without funding to pursue these options, online learning staff are working to share their talents to teach other faculty and staff about online innovations.

Fundamental Elements

Is There an Appropriate Program of Student Support Services Available Regardless of Place or Method of Delivery?

Since nearly 90 percent of NLC students are over 35 when they enter the program and because the NLC student body is in residence for short, intense periods of time, many of the extracurricular activities and support mechanisms that are in place at other schools are neither feasible nor desirable at the NLC. On the other hand, since all NLC courses require students to use technology to succeed, and many students are new to online learning and computer use, NLC support must often be comprehensive. Students who can jump right into learning technology are well supported with learning demos and clear instructions; students who need to be guided step by step through the learning or information systems are also well supported.

Since the NLC format allows new students to start at any point in the academic year, a new student orientation is offered during each week-in-residence. Other week-in-residence activities are sponsored during the week to encourage student interaction. The student-faculty forum in winter 2008 featured debate about a labor-environment coalition; it was widely attended and garnered thoughtful reactions and comments from participants. During most weeks in residence, students join together in the student lounge to celebrate a successful week of study with a farewell party on the final evening of the week; students usually organize an informal theme, and faculty often attend. Many students meet in the lounge on other nights as well; others prefer to spend their time studying in the library,

working in the computer lab, or exercising in the fitness center. In winter 2008, students participated in the installation of the College's second president; timed for the evening after classes meetings are completed to accommodate students' schedules, the board, students, staff, and faculty joined together to welcome Dr. William E. Scheuerman and celebrate his vision for the College.

For students who do not attend the week-in-residence, appropriate support services are offered at a distance. Orientation and regular contact from staff and faculty help students understand their role as active members of the online community, and tutorials and self help materials are readily available. Possibilities for a brief orientation video may be explored in the future.

Are There Qualified Professionals to Supervise and Provide the Student Support Services and Programs?

Deputy Provost Charles Hodell leads the student support services team with a proven track record with union activists and strong skills in advising and degree planning. As a former student of the College who earned his bachelor's degree through the Antioch University-George Meany Center partnership (a precursor to the College degree program), Dr. Hodell understands the challenges of pursuing a degree as an adult with multiple conflicting responsibilities. With a Master of Arts in Instructional Systems Development and a Ph.D. in Language, Literacy, and Culture, Dr. Hodell has extensively studied adult education and is well qualified to lead student support services.

Are There Procedures to Address the Varied Spectrum of Student Academic and Other Needs in a Manner that Is Equitable, Supportive, and Sensitive?

Student academic needs at the NLC are indeed varied, and the NLC offers specific procedures to sensitively support these needs. Returning to school after many years is a challenge for most NLC students, and the College's advising procedures give students the confidence to make good course choices. When students face frustration and discouragement from the struggle to balance their courses with work and family, they can turn to advisors, faculty, and staff for understanding support. For example, the extension policy for assignments is generous to help students achieve the learning goals of a course even when serious time conflicts interfere.

A central academic need that has been carefully addressed is students' writing. All NLC course require writing skills, and students who cannot write an upper-level undergraduate paper at least a C level (as determined by Maryland's Statewide English Composition Committee's guidelines) are often required to revise extensively with the guidance of their teachers. Since 2002, the College has offered a one-on-one tutorial program available to students with extreme writing challenges; professors may refer a student to the program with the provost's permission. Through email exchanges, telephone conversations, and on-campus meetings when possible, students receive customized guidance to enable them to move forward with their writing. The College is committed to helping students succeed; when students share that commitment, even the most dire writing issues can be addressed.

Nonacademic needs are also well addressed. Policies on discrimination, sexual harassment, and drug and alcohol abuse are printed in the Student Handbook and followed carefully. The

College meets the requirements of the American Disabilities Act of 1990 for accessibility. The College is not currently able to test students for learning disabilities, and mental health services are not available.

Are There Appropriate Student Advisement Procedures and Processes?

Advising at the NLC begins with the first contact. When students call, email, or approach College representatives with the interest in the degree programs, Professor Julie Ann Mendez-DeLeon follows up with an initial advising chat. Answering students' questions is a key aspect of this advising, but asking questions and analyzing the answers enables Professor Mendez-DeLeon to learn about students' academic history and work with them to build preliminary degree plans. Application and enrollment are often concurrent at the NLC, so it is imperative that students have this initial assessment and guidance before they register for courses. An advising hotline is also available to help students resolve their questions. Some of the informational advising may be shifted to the academic coordinator or other support staff in the future.

Advising continues when students take Educational Planning, a required course aimed towards helping students develop portfolios that document their prior learning experiences. The portfolio gathers transcripts, apprenticeship and military records, and training documents along with a resume, narrative, and experiential learning essays to build the history of students' learning experiences. Every student in the course is assigned to an advisor, and class time is set aside for student advising. On advising day, a team of faculty, staff, and administrators work individually with students to build customized degree plans. Students leave the class with a good idea about the credits they have already earned and what requirements they need to fulfill to achieve their degrees. In the online version of Educational Planning, the advising is handled through telephone and email discussions.

Student-advisor relationships continue after the course; in fact, the advisor usually serves as a contact person for a wide range of student questions. NLC advisors are knowledgeable about the programs and the support services offered; they also know about the expertise of other faculty and staff, so they are skilled at guiding students to the resources they need.

When students become seniors and enroll in the senior block courses, they graduate to a new kind of advisor—an intellectual relationship that many undergraduates never experience, since it is often reserved for graduate theses. Senior project advisors work to help students develop original research questions, research and find answers to the questions, and create a Senior Project. This collaborative relationship has yielded hundreds of outstanding projects, and students learn extensively as their advisors push them to go further with their results.

Are There Widely Disseminated, Reasonable Procedures for Equitably Addressing Student Complaints or Grievances?

Close relationships between students and their advisors and teachers offer a first line for managing student complaints. When students know they have a teacher or advisor to talk to when problems arise, they have an immediate solution available. If the advisors or other College representatives cannot resolve the issue, they contact the resident expert on the issue at hand to solve the problem. For example, when the new student information system

launched in the summer of 2007, many students had trouble logging in to the system to register. Complaints and frustration were not allowed to undermine the students' success. A member of the Academic Services team researched the problems, devised solutions, and worked with each student to ensure resolution; meanwhile, the registrar worked with the vendor to anticipate future student access problems.

To pre-empt issues involving student privacy, sexual harassment, discrimination, and drug and alcohol use, the College put policies in place that address these issues. Employees are required to sign agreements pledging to honor the policies, and students learn about these policies in orientation and through the Student Handbook.

In the winter 2008 term, a new student union system was developed to help students present their issues to the College. Each class elected a class steward; class stewards met and elected chief stewards; the entire student group analyzed the week in residence and prepared recommendations. The chief stewards met with the administration, and student issues were addressed. Plans to extend this system to the online courses are under consideration.

When complaints become serious, the NLC has established a grievance procedure. The Academic Review Committee is designed to consider grade grievances and academic misconduct issues; members include a student and student alternate, two faculty members and an alternate, and step-by-step procedures are laid out for addressing complaints.

Are There Records of Student Complaints or Grievances?

Records are kept of student complaints and grievances in an effort to minimize repetition of errors or problems and to assure student satisfaction with their experiences at the NLC. The online learning technical support representative tracks and manages problems with using Blackboard, and an admissions and registration support person handles complaints about the student information system. Both staff members go beyond recording complaints to generally solve the issue. Since the College is quite small, students have access to upper-level staff as well; if support staff members are unable to resolve problems, the provost or deputy provost is available.

Are There Policies and Procedures for Safe and Secure Maintenance of Student Records?

The NLC policy on student privacy is published in the 2003-2004 Student Handbook. The policy is modeled on, and complies with, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). These are the three basic principles:

- Students must have the right of access to their records
- Students must have the right to challenge any perceived inaccuracy or perceived privacy violation of their records
- Students must give written consent to release of records to anyone other than faculty and staff who require access to perform their duties

The registrar of the NLC, Eve Dauer, is primarily responsible for the maintenance and safeguarding of student records; she shares an overview of FERPA with students at

orientation and the welcome luncheon to ensure they understand their privacy rights. The policy is also printed in the Course Catalog and the Student Handbook.

The only confidential records that are not the responsibility of the registrar are those pertaining to financial aid and student accounts. The student services staff member responsible for financial aid matters keeps financial aid records. The controller and his staff keep student accounts. These are subject to the same requirements of NLC policy and federal law.

Are There Published and Implemented Policies for the Release of Student Information?

Students must give written consent to release of records to anyone other than faculty and staff. The registrar keeps a log of all requests for access to student records. These policies are published in the Student Handbook and are reviewed regularly with students.

Is There Ongoing Assessment of Student Support Services and the Utilization of Assessment Results for Improvement?

The deputy provost is strongly committed to regularly assessing the student services program and seeking improvements. The graduation survey, for example, collected data to ascertain student satisfaction with the support they received from the NLC. The information gleaned from short, informal surveys at orientation, graduation meetings, and welcome luncheons help keep Academic Services staff aware of issues that need to be addressed.

When problems arise, the deputy provost and other staff work hard to correct the issue and then examine causes to eliminate future problems of the same type. For example, when students had trouble using the student information system, the deputy provost and the registrar worked with the vendor to eliminate a system error that blocked student access.

Reactive resolutions are not the only assessment tools used to improve student support services. Close relationships with students allow staff to understand what students need. When students failed to sign up for advising appointments during the week in residence, for example, discussion revealed a perception that the advising was optional and that students felt their schedules were too tight to allow for advising time. The deputy provost then reexamined the advising program to determine solutions: telephone advising appointments before the week in residence, extended availability of advisors during the week in residence, and follow-up appointments afterwards.

Consistent, thoughtful assessment of support services has caused Academic Services staff to uncover gaps in NLC student support. Some assessment in this area results from informal discussion among Academic Services staff who work closely together, but the process has also been formalized in quarterly meetings among mid-level staff and weekly meetings for upper-level staff. Two recent results of this reflection involve registration and financial aid decisions. The new student information system was designed to ease students' access to their records and enable them to register for courses; as with all information systems, problems have been encountered, but most students find this online access valuable. For financial aid, a new financial administrator is working to make NLC students eligible for federal financial aid, to offer scholarships, and to give students a payment plan option.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Develop training materials for IQWeb to help students, staff, and faculty to better engage the information available. Hold on-campus training sessions for students during the week in residence and make self-directed tutorials available for distance students at the login screen.
2. Offer technical training time to faculty and staff working with online courses to help them further develop skills and ideas for improving online courses.
3. Offer an online writing lab to support student writing projects.

Faculty

The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Introduction

As the only institution of higher learning in the United States that focuses primarily on educating trade unionists, the NLC's resident faculty reflects this specialization by including labor leaders and practitioners who are knowledgeable in the key areas addressed by the curriculum. While the faculty's primary focus is on teaching, many faculty members sustain commitments to scholarship and activism within the labor movement.

Adjunct faculty supports the curriculum with additional expertise; many are tenured faculty members at other institutions, full-time unionists, or retired NLC faculty. Additionally, the senior administrators of the College, each with distinguished careers in the labor movement and academic labor education, continue to serve as faculty. This working group, which included one resident faculty member, an adjunct faculty member, and a student, examined documents pertaining to faculty, including the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild Collective Bargaining Agreement, the Learning Assessment Plan, and current syllabi, and interviewed faculty members and the provost.

The core teaching faculty of the NLC is small: 15 faculty members, including four administrators with faculty appointments, combine their central teaching responsibilities with specialized assignments pertinent to continued improvement of the curriculum and educational programs. Two librarians work with students on research challenges; one also teaches a bibliography and research course and contributes to the senior block courses. Additionally, a full-time archivist supports students with research instruction independently and in the senior block courses; a part-time archivist also serves the program.

Discussion

The NLC governance structure, addressed in detail in Standard 4, includes the Faculty Senate. Established through the collective bargaining agreement negotiated with the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild in 2003, the faculty governance system is limited by the number of faculty members available to serve and the availability of other represented constituencies. Currently, the Faculty Senate does not meet regularly, and faculty governance issues are addressed in the faculty meetings.

Although the Faculty Senate is not currently active, its guidelines lay out methods for governing the recommendations of standing committees and offer a clearly delineated structure to ensure that the College's academic needs are carefully considered. The Faculty

Senate seeks broad representation of College, so it is structured to include a range of College shareholders—library and archives staff, adjunct faculty, administrators, students, alumni, and academic and affiliate partners of the College. The chair of the Faculty Senate, Professor Katherine Sciacchitano, also serves as a representative to the Board of Trustees, which contributes to improved communication among the governing bodies.

Several committees work within the structure of the faculty itself to ensure participation in key areas of the College. The Academic Standards Committee and Curriculum Committees work together to review courses for appropriate academic rigor, assessment, and fulfillment of the Learning Assessment Plan. Additionally, the Facilities Committee helps connect faculty to the physical campus by establishing a safety plan, recommending books for the College bookstore, and ensuring that the students' on-campus needs are met.

The Academic Standards Committee established a template for course syllabi to ensure that all courses have clearly stated course objectives that connect to the core competencies described in the Learning Assessment Plan. Professors Regina Dearden, Bonnie Ladin, and Katherine Sciacchitano have worked to enhance the College's academic mission by making syllabi consistent and clearly tied to learning outcomes and institutional assessment.

The Curriculum Committee extends the work of the Academic Standards Committee by reviewing courses to consider how they fulfill the College's mission. Through proactive review of curriculum to ensure that it makes sense, avoids duplication, and fits the mission statement and strategic planning process, Professors Katherine Sciacchitano and Peter Hoefer, and Archivist Lynda DeLoach contribute to the improvement of the College's academic standards.

When faculty members develop new courses, the Curriculum Committee requires that they submit initial course descriptions and a Core Competencies and Course Objectives matrix that explains how the proposed course's objectives will work within the College's mission and the Learning Assessment Plan. If the course is approved, the syllabus is requested for Committee review. The Committee offers revisions as necessary and requires a final syllabus one month before the course is offered to students. In 2004, the Curriculum Committee established a plan to audit the syllabi of all courses, examining courses to affirm that student activities support course objectives and that these activities are assessed by the instructor. Following this work, the Committee evaluated individual courses for credit worthiness.

The Academic Standards and Curriculum Committees have contributed to the improvement of institutional and student assessment through their review of courses and syllabi. As a result of the small number of full-time faculty members, only three faculty members serve on each committee; limitations in size impact the committees' capability to keep up with the growth of the College's educational offerings. However, a review of syllabi and courses reveals that their work has effectively improved the academic standards of the College. These committees enable faculty to have oversight of College growth, particularly in the expansion of courses, and to avoid duplication of courses.

The next step in faculty governance, which the College is currently instituting, is a pre-cursor to a department structure for degree programs. Individual faculty members are assigned to specific programs to enrich and enhance the student experience, to oversee scheduling and

communications, and to ensure that all elements of the College community are kept abreast of additions and changes. At current size, division into department structures does not make sense, although assigning coordinators to each program area serves as an initial attempt to move in that direction. Currently, Professor Regina Dearden manages the online courses, Professor Bonnie Ladin organizes the Union Skills courses, and Professor Julie Ann Mendez-De Leon oversees the week-in-residence courses.

Another step currently in progress is to institute further quality control of the online courses. The Distance Education Academic Steering Committee has been established to develop benchmarks for the quality of online courses, to offer online faculty support and development, to examine best practices in online student assessment, and to address intellectual property issues.

Faculty recruitment efforts are not a priority for the College at this time; although all constituencies of the institution recognize that recruitment is important, funding is not currently available. As the College grows, and funding increases, recruiting faculty to expand the College's ability to address the needs of the core student population will become more realistic. At this time, the College adds to its faculty on a limited, as-needed basis. For example, in the fall of 2007 the College addressed the need for an English professor through a short-term appointment of an adjunct professor who has been teaching writing courses at the NLC since 1999.

Assignment of faculty responsibilities aims to enhance the College's abilities to serve the core student population; an example is the work to build on student support services. When analysis of student enrollment revealed that, despite previous efforts, some students were enrolling for courses out of sequence, Deputy Provost Charles Hodell and Professor Julie Ann Mendez-De Leon organized a pre-admissions advising program, which has improved the readiness of the student population for course work and ensured that students meet requirements in sequence. Additionally, the entire student advising function is now distributed among faculty, so students can develop long-term advisor/advisee relationships.

The coordinators for the College's online, Union Skills, and week-in-residence programs will collect and analyze data in order to respond to student demand for courses. This work helps ensure that students are able to move towards graduation more easily, since part of the analysis involves scheduling required courses for the majors, examining the need for new courses, and ensuring that updates are made in all College literature.

Additionally, faculty members serve on the Enrollment Management Committee, which examines the number of students enrolled and how to increase enrollment. In another area, the Student-Faculty Forum Committee helps bring emerging issues to light by presenting speakers and panel discussions during the week in residence; students, faculty, and administrators find these events significantly add to the College's ability to address the academic needs of the students. Other faculty offer research tutorials and one-on-one special assistance, which give students the help they need to succeed. Overall, faculty assignments both in and out of the classroom are established to help students succeed.

Current efforts to assess faculty performance and evaluation for promotion and tenure are effective and appropriate to the current needs. In the last collective bargaining agreement,

the faculty tenure and promotion procedure was introduced. The agreement also describes the plan for peer review: for the first four years after being hired, faculty are required to be reviewed annually; after that peer review occurs every other year. Currently, according to the agreement, tenured faculty review is limited to examination of teaching evaluations and course materials. Student evaluations are an important part of evaluating faculty, and besides the formal end-of-course evaluations, students are encouraged to discuss course outcomes with administrators.

Additionally, recognizing that workload assessment is a key part of effective evaluation, the College is attempting to review workloads to look at the appropriate and optimal workload for faculty. To facilitate this process, faculty prepared and submitted work plans to the provost, and the provost met with each faculty member to discuss individual workloads. Continued discussion about appropriate assignments is ongoing via the Workload and Assignment Committee.

The adjunct faculty is well integrated into the overall academic program. Many of the College's adjunct faculty members hold full-time academic or union positions elsewhere, so their availability for regular faculty meetings is limited. However, adjuncts participate in faculty meetings during the weeks-in-residence, and are informally solicited for assistance, based on College need and adjunct faculty expertise. Since retired professors often return to the College as adjuncts, they offer continuity and institutional experience that enhances the academic program.

The adjunct faculty members have played a key role in the development of new courses, particularly in the online program. For example, the adjunct science instructor developed an online course to help students meet their general education requirements and learn about the connections between science and labor studies. Similarly, the adjunct film instructor, renowned for his academic contributions to working-class studies, developed a course on film and globalization. Adjuncts allow the College to offer courses on specialized topics, creating a well-rounded curriculum.

Administrators maintain close contact with adjuncts through academic coordinators on the support staff, who provide details about appointments to teach eight weeks before a term begins. Academic requirement guidelines, policy changes, and additions to the curriculum are shared in memos, contracts, publications, and forms; this communication is followed up during the week in residence (or via email for online courses) with a faculty resource folder that allows adjuncts to quickly become familiar with the schedule for the week. Additionally, adjunct professors receive detailed feedback from student course evaluations, which are reviewed by the provost to ensure that students receive quality instruction.

Currently the College is working on a better system of orientation and communication with the adjunct faculty. Systems being explored include an adjunct faculty manual, list serves with regular updates, and systematic communication. Additionally, adjuncts organized as a bargaining unit with the American Federation of Teachers and held their first union meeting in the fall of 2007; they have appointed a committee to develop a contract that will address their increased integration into the academic program and communication between the College and adjuncts. The College hopes to negotiate this contract in 2008.

Fundamental Elements

Are Faculty and Other Professionals Appropriately Prepared and Qualified for the Positions They Hold?

The NLC faculty is well prepared and qualified for the positions they hold. With just 15 full-time core faculty members, their talents are broad and diverse to meet the educational needs of NLC students. Most faculty members combine graduate degrees with personal and practical experiences in their individual disciplines and in the effort to preserve the rights of working people. The adjunct faculty members are also well qualified to teach at the NLC: many hold full-time positions at other institutions or unions; others are retired NLC faculty.

Are Their Roles and Responsibilities Clear?

The roles and responsibilities of the NLC faculty are clearly delineated in the collective bargaining agreement between the College and the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild, which represents faculty. The agreement protects the rights of faculty both individually and collectively and establishes standards and procedures for appointment, promotion, discipline and dismissal of faculty, including academic freedom.

As discussed above, faculty responsibilities extend beyond courses they teach; with just 11 faculty members, most take on multiple roles. Currently, three faculty members serve as coordinators of the three program areas (week-in-residence, online, and Union Skills courses). Additionally faculty members fulfill responsibilities for advising, governance, committee work, and curriculum development.

Are They Sufficiently Numerous To Fulfill Their Roles?

The NLC has 15 core resident faculty members, including four administrators with faculty appointments, and librarians and archivists who contribute to instruction or teach their own courses. In addition, the NLC engages the talents of a small group of long-time adjunct faculty to keep class size small and to add diversity to the curriculum. While class sizes have ranged from two to 32, the average NLC class size is 15 students per class. Maintaining this class size allows faculty members to get to know their students, to work closely with them, to assess student progress and competency on an ongoing basis, to advise students, and to keep in regular touch with them throughout the non-residential course periods. While at times a mismatch between expertise and needs is a challenge, for the most part the small faculty serves the curriculum well.

Are Educational Curricula Designed, Maintained, and Updated by Faculty?

As discussed more extensively above, the NLC faculty works closely with the curriculum as a whole to ensure that the students' educational needs are met. Since many of the NLC courses present the latest ideas and theories about labor issues, faculty members endeavor to stay on top of their individual fields, seeking new ideas to challenge students and promote their success in the labor movement and global economy.

Additionally, faculty members invest a great deal of time and analysis in reworking and improving their classes, based on feedback from students in formal and informal course evaluations, discussions of student interests, and new directions in the labor movement. An extensive array of new courses has been developed in the past five years. Many faculty

members have begun to instruct students in the online program, increasing the number of courses from less than five in 2004 to 44 in 2008.

At the NLC, faculty members who teach the same (i.e., Educational Planning or Introduction to Labor Studies) or related courses (i.e., Health and Safety courses or the Senior Block) regularly meet to discuss how the courses work together and/or overlap in terms of helping students to develop core competencies. The entire faculty meets monthly to discuss curriculum issues and works together to develop strategies that will enhance the programs.

Does the Faculty Including Teaching Assistants Demonstrate Excellence and Continued Professional Growth?

Excellence and continued professional growth are clearly demonstrated by the NLC faculty, as each instructor works to stay current in his or her individual discipline and with labor issues. A reflection of the faculty's professional growth is the demand for College faculty to present at other educational institutions and at local, national, and international labor conferences, to write for labor journals, and to present learning opportunities for NLC students. Additionally several faculty members have enrolled in graduate programs. In the past few years, faculty have demonstrated their excellence in numerous ways:

- Coordinated the Spring 2007 NLC Seminar featuring labor law reformer Prof. Liu Cheng of Shanghai Normal University, Faculty of Law and Politics, and Ellen Friedman, China labor rights activist. Participants included faculty from other colleges and universities, attorneys; international affairs staff, and NLC faculty.
- Pursued a Ph.D. in Twentieth Century U.S. History at the University of Maryland College Park.
- Enhanced the Student-Faculty Forum by bringing students together with scholars, activists, policy analysts, NLC faculty, and others to discuss issues of major significance to the labor movement. Recent guest presenters included Georgetown University historian Michael Kazin; Vermont NEA organizer and China labor rights activist Ellen Friedman; author and labor/environmental movement activist and author Les Leopold.
- Coordinated a panel presentation by NLC graduates at the American Public Health Association.
- Served on the board of the annual Washington, D.C Labor Film Festival.
- Presented a panel discussion at the 2008 United Association of Labor Educators (UALE) and a workshop on economic education at the 2007 UALE conference.
- Participated in a "Cross Border Dialog" with Canadian, U.S., and Mexican activists in Toronto in the Spring of 2007.
- Collaborated with the Labour Education Center in Toronto.
- Published essays in *Dissent Magazine* and *Dollars & Sense: The Magazine for Economic Justice*.
- Developed a national symposium on the intersection of labor, race, and gender.
- Led the DC Labor Chorus.

Is There Demonstrated Institutional Support for the Advancement and Development of Faculty?

The College promotes professional development, as formally described in the collective bargaining agreement with the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild, requiring that faculty submit professional development plans, and supporting faculty with the purchase of pertinent materials. Faculty members who wish to pursue additional degrees or courses of study are eligible for work load adjustments, six-month leaves of absence, and financial support for related degree programs. In the past five years, several faculty members have pursued additional degrees or other specialized courses of study. Additionally, faculty attend conferences relevant to their specializations, for example, the United Association for Labor Educators Conference and the Instructional Technology Council Conference.

Is There Recognition of Appropriate Linkages Among Scholarship, Teaching, Student Learning, Research, and Service?

As an institution devoted to teaching, the NLC does not require that faculty present research and publication projects. However, to stay current with their fields, most faculty members pursue independent or more formal courses of study within their own disciplines. The College supports the purchase of new publications and other relevant materials, and the librarians keep the faculty and staff informed as new developments come to light and make materials available within the library and online.

Clear linkages among scholarship, teaching, student learning, and research are prominent in the students' Senior Projects. In addition to demonstrating the effectiveness of teaching and learning at the NLC, these projects present original research and a level of scholarship unique to the NLC. This work has proven to be instrumental in the labor movement, as students apply their learning to their local and international unions, offering new solutions and ideas.

Are There Published and Implemented Standards and Procedures for all Faculty and Other Professionals Based on Principles of Fairness with Due Regard for the Rights of all Persons?

Standards and procedures regarding fairness and the rights of all persons are laid out in detail in the collective bargaining agreement between the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild, which represents faculty and other professionals, and the NLC. By establishing these procedures in a signed agreement, the College ensures that procedures for appointment, promotion, discipline and dismissal of faculty are fair and protect faculty rights. Additionally, the agreement addresses academic freedom, stating the College's policy to support full freedom within the law for inquiry, teaching, research, and publication, and respect and dignity.

Are There Carefully Articulated Procedures and Criteria for Review of all Individuals Who Have Responsibility for the Educational Program of the Institution?

The collective bargaining agreement establishes detailed criteria for the review of all faculty and staff who contribute to the educational program at the NLC. An extensive review process is required before faculty are hired, followed by a 12-month probationary period and a mandatory review. Tenured faculty members are reviewed regularly through the peer review system described in the collective bargaining agreement. Additionally, the provost

reviews student evaluation forms and meets with faculty members individually to discuss job performance, current and new job responsibilities, and professional development opportunities. Monthly faculty meetings serve as an additional review of the academic program.

Are There Criteria for the Appointment, Supervision, and Review of Part-Time, Adjunct, and Other Faculty?

The NLC carefully examines the appointment, supervision, and review of adjunct faculty. New adjunct faculty members are interviewed and are required to present documentation of their academic achievements, including transcripts and resumes. The provost or deputy provost introduces new faculty to the College program, and syllabi are reviewed by the Academic Standards and Curriculum Committees. Extensive training takes place for faculty hired to teach Educational Planning, and portfolio review enables the deputy provost to ensure that instructors are helping students achieve course goals. Additionally, the provost reviews student evaluations, shares them with adjunct faculty, and meets with them to discuss any issues that arise. Adjunct faculty members only earn additional teaching appointments if they meet the NLC's academic standards. Recently, the NLC refused to rehire an adjunct instructor who did not perform up to standards.

Most adjuncts at the NLC are long-time contributors to the academic program and offer extensive experience in their disciplines and in the labor movement, for example:

- A professor and director of the honors program at Northern Kentucky University, who has written extensively about labor films, including a new book published in 2007 and chapters in central working-class studies collections teaches Images of Labor in Film and Film and Globalization.
- A professor at Hofstra University who has been teaching science courses at the NLC for 25 years teaches Physics for Unionist and Science, Technology, and Our World.
- A retired NLC professor who led the Rail Workers' Hazardous Materials Training Program teaches numerous courses in health and safety.
- An educational representative with a doctorate in labor education from the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers' (IAMAW) training center and former professor at Ohio State University teaches Introduction to Labor Studies.

Is there Adherence to Principles of Academic Freedom, Within the Context of Institutional Mission?

The NLC supports the principles of academic freedom, as discussed at greater length in Standard 6: Integrity. The academic freedom of faculty members is protected and described in Article 23 of the collective bargaining agreement.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Streamline faculty governance structure to fit the size and capacity of the faculty.
2. Develop performance evaluations to set markers for faculty and to establish realistic workloads.

3. Develop more detailed procedures for peer review as delineated in the collective bargaining agreement.
4. Develop a formalized system to share updates with adjuncts to further integrate them into the academic program.

Educational Offerings

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

Introduction

Subsequent to the 2003 site visit, the Middle States evaluation team report focused on improvements in the library. As the curriculum has grown and changed, the faculty and staff of the NLC have focused attention on students' library needs. With the majority of students pursuing research projects from a distance, current plans and efforts for offering a virtual library have been adequate, but still present much potential development, as resources allow.

A key development is a web page for The George Meany Memorial Archives Library (GMMAL). The page provides a gateway to two reference databases: EBSCOhost and Maryland Digital Library. EBSCOhost contains valuable databases that, in most cases, provide full-text articles from key magazines and journals. Maryland Digital Library is a consortium of libraries from the state of Maryland. Additionally, the page will have links for general reference and labor resources, and the NLC is raising funds to expand the offerings of the library to include e-books and health related online periodicals.

While resources have been invested in the online library program, the physical library has also grown. Holdings have increased regularly, as the librarians track new, relevant releases and make them available to students and faculty, and the addition of a labor film library has enhanced the collection overall. Unfortunately, access to distance materials is limited on site, because the library workstations have become outdated; the College looks to refurbish these computers in the near future.. Since many students and some adjunct faculty need books at a distance, arrangements have been made to fulfill these needs with an interlibrary loan program.

Discussion

The educational offerings of NLC are organized and reviewed by two standing faculty committees of the College: the Academic Standards and the Curriculum Committees under the direction of the Learning Assessment Plan, which translates the mission into clear student learning objectives. The current curriculum review process, developed in 2003 and instituted in 2004, examines courses to determine if they meet the core competencies, which reflect the mission to prepare union officers, staff, and activists for the challenges of leadership in the 21st century and to bring higher education to workers. Each course is measured for the following core competencies: leadership, critical thinking, effective communication, global thinking, information literacy and technical proficiency. When

instructors submit a course for review to the Curriculum Committee, they link the objectives of the course to the core competencies in a Core Competencies and Course Objectives form and follow a syllabus template to present these objectives to the students.

In October 2004, the provost outlined a process that would ensure that both degree program courses and Union Skills courses conform to the Learning Assessment Plan. To avoid overwhelming the instructors or the committees, the provost outlined a two-phase process that ensured all courses would be reviewed in a timely manner; instructors were required to revise their syllabi to address how individual courses worked to accomplish core learning objectives. During this review, Union Skills courses were evaluated for credit and began to be included in the degree plans for students pursuing bachelor's degrees. As online course were developed, they were built with and measured by the College's core competency requirements.

The curriculum review process is well established, and the Curriculum Committee has been in place for five years. A review of majors was completed before the curriculum committee came into formal existence. Through this review, one major, Organizational Dynamics and Growth, was dropped from the offerings due to a lack of interest. Since its inception, the Curriculum Committee has focused on reviewing new courses in three major areas:

- Bachelors of Technical and Professional Studies (BTPS),
- Health and Safety, and
- Political Economy.

The Curriculum Committee has also focused on the following:

- vetting new course proposals across the remainder of the curriculum,
- avoiding unnecessary duplication of courses, and
- ensuring proper documentation of new courses.

While work remains in the above areas, the next stage is supporting the faculty in a more comprehensive review and to compare the resources and offerings to the College's goals; much of this work will be handled by the Academic Standards Committee.

The Curriculum Committee also needs to assist the faculty in a review of the coordination among courses offered during the week in residence, online, and in Union Skills formats. To that end, the provost and deputy provost reviewed the areas of responsibility within Academic Services, and three coordinator positions were developed to further evaluate the educational offerings and their formats. Each of the coordinators volunteered for the position, and each oversees an area where she has much experience. The three areas are the Bachelor of Arts program, the BTPS program and online courses, and the Union Skills courses. The first task will be reviewing the relevance of the offerings in light of current and potential students needs and the NLC core competencies.

The program coordinators meet regularly to review the course offerings and determine if the needs of the students are being met by the format/delivery system of the course. The coordinators have also begun reviewing the annual schedule of each program in an effort to develop a schedule that allows students to meet the requirements of each program in a reasonably timely manner.

In addition, Academic Services restructured the support staff assignments to further assist the work of the program chairs. A new support position, academic coordinator, was created to oversee the academic schedule and work with the provost and deputy provosts to ensure the work of the program coordinators is implemented.

One area that has yet to be explored by the Curriculum Committee is the certificate program now being offered by the College. Each course within the certificates has been reviewed by the Curriculum Committee, but it has not reviewed the certificates as a whole or looked at the certificate offerings in comparison to majors and the mixture of formats within the certificate course offerings.

Both the library and the archives are well integrated into the degree program curriculum, despite financial and staff limitations. Since many courses require research components, all NLC week-in-residence students are required to attend an orientation for The George Meany Memorial Archives Library (GMMAL). The orientation teaches students how to use the library, both on campus and from a distance, and students receive their bar codes, which allow them to check out books and access the online databases. Many courses include research projects or components, so the early introduction is important to help students develop information literacy skills.

While students who take online courses exclusively do not have access to the onsite library tour, the library website serves as a fair alternative. Additionally, the online program offers Bibliography and Research, a three-credit course taught by the senior librarian that educates students about conducting print and electronic research. Evaluations for the course are extremely positive; the central project for the course challenges students' critical thinking, information literacy, and writing skills and helps them develop ideas for original research.

Many of the students' Senior Projects tap into the advantages of having the AFL-CIO archives and an academic library on campus. Since students are often unaware of how the library and archives can help them with their research, the Senior Seminar includes a session that covers online and print research given by the senior GMMAL librarian, and a session on archival research presented by an archivist from The George Meany Memorial Archives (GMMA). The sessions cover how to conduct primary, secondary, and tertiary research by engaging the library and archives resources. Additionally, to ease access and to tie the archives program to students, the GMMA has targeted subject, topic, and reference files that Senior Seminar students are likely to request or find useful for their projects and makes them available during weeks in residence.

Other than the initial library tour, which week-in-residence students take part in during their first term, the option to take the elective Bibliography and Research, and research requirements in many of the courses, students are not generally introduced to the GMMA and archival research until the end of their course of study. Although other courses require research projects, the Senior Seminar course is the capstone of the NLC program, and its demand for original research propels students towards the College's research offerings. To give students an earlier opportunity to engage in archival research, the GMMA staff proposes to meet with NLC instructors to review their courses to determine if archival

research can be included in their curriculum. As faculty members develop new classes, archivists offer insights about materials that might be used.

Additionally, archivists have presented courses of their own. The online course Leadership and Landmark Events in 20th Century Labor History, developed by an NLC archivist, uses numerous materials from the GMMA collection. The course highlights the richness of the archives collection and allows students to have a broader understanding of the depth and importance of the GMMA. Archivists are currently developing additional online courses to better extend the College holdings to the students.

Assessment reveals that the current educational offerings are adequate to fulfill the College's mission, though the entire College envisions continued development and refinement to improve the academic program. Currently a student end-of-course survey is posted in all online BTPS courses, and week-in-residence students evaluate their courses at the end of the class sessions. The surveys give students the opportunity to express their opinions of the course, including how the course directly affected their learning.

Course evaluation results are tabulated by the academic coordinator and reviewed by the instructor, the provost, and the deputy provosts. Faculty and administrators use the evaluation results to analyze the instructor's effectiveness in the classroom as well as the overall quality of the course. The provost also uses these results when analyzing work load and assignments for the faculty, and some courses have been reorganized based on the evaluations. Additionally, instructors regularly make changes and improvements based on the evaluations and their own assessments of the courses.

For online courses, instructor end-of-course surveys are posted to give instructors an opportunity to reflect on their teaching experiences, while at the same time providing the NLC with faculty perspectives on students and the course. The survey results are available to instructors and the NLC administration, who use the results of both student and faculty surveys to compare course experiences and improve teaching effectiveness. Also, the College sends out surveys to graduates to determine their level of satisfaction with the degree programs. Assessment is more fully discussed in Standard 7 and Standard 14.

As the BTPS program progresses, surveys and interviews should be conducted of former BTPS students and graduates regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of the program. Statistics, such as graduation rates, should be analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the program. At this time no students have graduated from the BTPS program, but those in the pipeline are advised regularly by faculty and complete end-of-course assessments, which are analyzed by the Distance Education Academic Steering Committee through the Online Class Survey Results.

Fundamental Elements

Are the Educational Offerings Congruent with the Mission? Do They Include Appropriate Areas of Academic Study of Sufficient Content, Breadth and Length?

The NLC currently offers a Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies that features six areas of concentration: Labor Studies, Labor Education, Labor Safety and Health, Labor History, Political Economics of Labor, and Union Leadership and Administration. Each major, combined with the core curriculum, requires four courses from the concentration and one elective. The range of courses within each major has grown to match student interests, the global environment, and the College mission. All courses offered are required to fit into the Learning Assessment Plan core competency design, which creates consistency and clear connection to the institution's overall purpose.

Are They Conducted at Levels of Rigor Appropriate to the Programs or Degrees Offered?

The NLC's educational offerings are rigorous and appropriate for a bachelor's program. To earn their degrees, students must successfully complete a total of 120 credit hours with clearly defined requirements that address general education needs and upper-level learning. Of the 120 credits, students transfer in a minimum of 54 credits; students must earn 15 credits in general studies requirements (unless transferred), 15 credits in core curriculum courses, 15 credits in the student's area of concentration, and the remainder in electives.

As a degree completion institution, the NLC accepts numerous forms of transfer credit. In addition to accepting accredited apprenticeships, college credits from other institutions, and military and testing credits, the NLC helps students evaluate experiential learning, which may comprise as much as 30 credits towards the bachelor's degree. The requirements for experiential learning credits are rigorous and uniformly applied.

Required courses direct students' degree plans: all students must satisfactorily complete Educational Planning, Introduction to Labor Studies, Comparative Research Methods, Senior Seminar, and Senior Project to graduate. This core curriculum constitutes 15 required credits that straddle student's completion of their major requirements; the first two courses generally form the students initial term, and the last nine credits structure the final term.

Since the NLC is an upper-level degree granting institution, all courses are offered at the 300 and 400 levels. In addition, students must be sufficiently prepared academically and intellectually to complete their assignments with the guidance of online learning software. Current students and graduates of the NLC value the quality of the instruction and the high level of expectations the faculty have for them intellectually, culminating in the uniquely demanding and rewarding Senior Project.

Is the Undergraduate Degree Program Designed to Foster a Coherent Student Learning Experience and to Promote Synthesis of Learning? Are Program Goals Stated in Terms of Student Learning Outcomes?

The undergraduate degree program is designed to foster a coherent student learning experience that establishes student competencies central to the NLC mission of preparing union representatives for the challenge of leadership in the global economy. The program's

goals are articulated fully in the Learning Assessment Plan. Every student who graduates from the NLC is expected to acquire, develop, and demonstrate proficiency in the following competencies: leadership, critical thinking, effective communication (written and oral), global thinking, information literacy, and technological capabilities.

The core of the upper-level NLC curriculum—Educational Planning, Introduction to Labor Studies, courses in the student’s areas of concentration, Comparative Research methods, Senior Seminar and Senior Project—has been carefully developed to build these competencies. The College assesses student development in these competencies through the Educational Planning class, portfolio assessment, the advising process, faculty assessment of student work, and the Senior Project.

Is There Periodic Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Curricular Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Experiences Provided for Students, and Are the Evaluation Results Utilized for Improving the Student Development Program and for Enabling Students to Understand Their Own Educational Progress?

Student evaluation of instructors and courses has been an integral part of NLC practice since 1997. The evaluation forms allow students to comment on the clarity of the course objectives and the modalities of instruction used to realize those objectives. Student evaluations are compiled and analyzed by the provost and faculty to consider improvements in content and delivery. Overall analysis of the compiled standardized evaluations shows a high level of student satisfaction with the clarity of course objectives and the means of instruction.

Additionally, a survey of graduates and current undergraduates reveals alumni perceptions of learning outcomes. Faculty and staff also learn much from students about their reactions to curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and policy and improvement discussion take place at regular faculty meetings.

Are There Adequate Learning Resources, Facilities, Instructional Equipment, Library Services, and Professional Library Staff to Support the Institution’s Educational Programs?

The NLC is committed to the proposition that the low-residency format should not diminish the quality of student scholarship, and it directs its resources towards building a strong academic program. One focus has been the George Meany Memorial Archives Library (GMMAL). The archives is a valuable resource for research by scholars and the general public and has been located on the campus since 1987. Since 1993, the library has shared the same building as the archives.

The library’s holdings offer rich resources for the study of various aspects of the labor movement and the world of working women and men. Among the specific topics that receive special attention in the holdings are the following: labor history, labor law, social insurance, industrial hygiene, and social welfare policies. As the NLC has a central academic focus, the library’s holdings are specifically appropriate to assist labor studies students. In addition to specialized materials, the library contains traditional reference works. To meet the needs of distance research, the librarians have developed a library web page that

combines research databases, references, and other assistance since most students pursue their research at a distance.

The archives contains rare documents and material from the entire history of the American labor movement, as the archival records of both the AFL-CIO and the Department of Labor are housed within the archives on the NLC campus. Faculty, students, and outside scholars are able to make use of primary source material in their academic pursuits.

Is There Collaboration Between Professional Library Staff and Faculty in Teaching and Fostering Information Literacy Skills Relevant to the Curriculum? Are There Programs that Promote Student Use of Information and Learning Resources?

Information literacy is a core competency of the NLC learning program, and librarians, archivists, faculty and staff work together to promote student achievement in this area. Librarians and archives staff regularly make presentations to NLC classes at the request of the faculty. Some presentations focus on how to use research resources available in the NLC library and other libraries near the students' homes programs. Other presentations focus on the use of online resources for research, and those sessions are held in the NLC computer lab. In addition, a library tour is a mandatory part of new student orientation. Presentations by archives staff have included how to find and use primary documents in research projects, what is in and how to use the NLC archives, and how to conduct interviews in the context of historical and case study research.

For the past five years the library staff have devoted considerable time and resources to increasing the online capabilities of the faculty in accordance with the revolution in technology and Internet access and the needs of students in low-residency and online courses. Students and faculty at the NLC have become increasingly sophisticated in their use of new technologies, such as the Blackboard learning platform used in degree program courses. The computer lab has been expanded over the past five years and is in great demand in and outside of class time. All residence hall rooms on campus are wired to facilitate the increasingly common use of student laptops, and the Kirkland Center building provides extensive technological resources that can be used inside and outside the classroom.

Is the Quality of Instruction, Academic Rigor, and Educational Effectiveness of Courses and Programs Comparable Regardless of the Location or Delivery Mode?

The NLC offers courses in both a low-residency format and fully online that specifically maintain a high level of academic rigor while meeting the needs of working students. The flexible format allows students to pursue a college education without giving up their jobs and careers, and the instructors specifically structure courses and assignments to maximize learning outcomes for adult learners. Academic rigor is measured by the Academic Standards Committee, and consistency and connection to core competencies are monitored by the Curriculum Committee; student evaluations are used to track student satisfaction with learning and delivery.

Are There Published and Implemented Policies and Procedures Regarding Transfer Credit Which Considers Course Equivalencies?

Transfer credit policies and procedures are readily available in the College Course Catalog, and on the College website. Additionally, students learn more about these policies in Educational Planning. In general, the College accepts the credits and the course-level ranking of the transferring school, as long as that institution is accredited, and the student has received a grade of C or higher. Under no circumstances are students allowed to transfer in courses that would replace the last thirty NLC credits. Credits from other institutions that have articulation agreements with the College are not treated as transfer credits, but as NLC credits.

Are Such Criteria Fair, Consistently Applied, and Publicly Communicated?

The criteria for transfer credit are clearly and publicly communicated and criteria are fair and consistently applied. Written statements are available in the Course Catalog and Student Handbook, on the website, in Educational Planning materials, and in the Policies and Regulations Manual for Academic Services. The registrar, under the direction of the deputy provost, works to apply all the policies in a fair and consistent manner.

Are Practices and Policies that Reflect the Needs of Adult Learners Consistent with The Institution's Educational Programs and Student Cohorts?

The entire program of education at the NLC is designed and implemented with the adult learner in mind, since the institution is devoted to labor and workers' education. Programs of labor education and workers' education begun and conducted by the labor movement in the early 20th century are the original source of most of the now widely accepted ideas and practices associated with the special needs of adult learners. Every class at the NLC is designed with these special needs in mind, and has been from the inception of the institution. The pedagogy is active, participatory, multi-faceted, and competency-based. The low-residency, high intensity delivery format is another key aspect that helps to meet the needs of adult learners. Traditional semester-long formats are not accessible to or feasible for most of the NLC's students.

Do Course Syllabi Incorporate Expected Learning Outcomes?

Course instructors articulate individual course learning goals in their prepared syllabi, which are required to follow a template that presents how the course addresses the core competencies delineated in the Learning Assessment Plan. Course syllabi were reviewed by the Curriculum Committee, and new courses are required to submit the Core Competencies and Course Objectives form during course development.

Is There Assessment of Student Learning and Outcomes Relative to the Goals and Objectives of the Undergraduate Program, and Are the Results Used to Improve Student Learning and Program Effectiveness?

The NLC has a primary commitment, central to its mission, to teaching and student learning that is productive and accurately assessed in terms of learning and outcomes. The process of learning assessment is discussed in greater detail in Standards 7 and 14.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Review the certificate programs to ensure that they do not duplicate or undermine the majors and determine if they are meeting the needs of the students.
2. Expand the online resources of the library and archives.
3. Further develop the GMMAL web page.

General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.

Introduction

General education skills are emphasized in the National Labor College's Learning Assessment Plan to ensure that all students exhibit college-level proficiency in leadership, critical thinking, effective communication, global thinking, information literacy, and technological proficiency. By requiring that all degree courses address elements of these core learning goals, the College has ensured an integrated approach to general education requirements.

Specific general education courses are a required part of the NLC curriculum; students must fulfill at least three semester credits each in English composition, mathematics, biological and physical sciences, arts and humanities, and social and behavioral sciences for a total of 15 required general education credits. Experiential credits are not awarded for these core requirements. If students do not have transfer credits to fulfill these requirements, the NLC offers upper-division courses in most of these areas.

The degree program incorporates general education proficiencies in required courses, electives, and final graduation projects. Specific courses address the basic components of general education, including oral and written communication skills, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and technological skills; additionally numerous courses in the arts and humanities and social sciences challenge students' intellectual development, helping them to develop connections among ideas and build cultural and global awareness.

Discussion

The NLC's students' general education needs are met effectively through a combination of transfer credit and NLC courses. Although 15 credits are specifically required to address general education, all courses, beginning with Educational Planning and Introduction to Labor Studies (the first two required courses), followed by courses that meet each major's requirements and culminating in the senior block courses, help students achieve general education proficiencies.

Oral and written communications are elemental aspects of general education, and these skills are emphasized in all NLC courses. All students are required to earn credits in English composition, and many enroll with three or more credits from community or four-year

colleges. When students have not fulfilled this requirement, the NLC presents them with several fulfillment choices. Students may take freshman English courses at a local university or community college and transfer the credits; they may enroll in Effective Writing, an online course in English rhetoric and composition, or they can take Reading & Writing Critically during week-in-residence. Additionally, two distinct literature courses are offered in each format with extensive writing requirements. Many students who enroll with English composition credits elect to take English or literature courses to strengthen their skills and explore the research components of these courses, which help prepare them for other courses and the Senior Project.

Beyond the English and composition courses at the NLC, writing is highly valued and emphasized. Although the College does not have a formal writing-across-the-curriculum program, most courses require extensive writing, and the faculty are committed to ensuring that students graduate with solid writing skills. Even courses that do not traditionally require students to write essays, for example physics and distance learning education courses, require students to demonstrate their critical thinking skills in essays or other writing assignments. The two introductory, required courses, Educational Planning and Introduction to Labor Studies, have rigorous writing components, and the Senior Project—the final College requirement—results in original student research and writing.

Scientific and quantitative reasoning are also well addressed at the NLC. Science classes have been developed specifically for the nontraditional NLC student body with success, and many courses in safety and health address scientific applications and analyses that directly impact workers. Additionally, quantitative reasoning is addressed in numerous courses beyond the initial requirements, in particular Comparative Research Methods, a Senior Block course that helps students to understand how to prepare and analyze the survey work that is part of the Senior Project. College-level math courses are usually found in students' transfer credits; while the College does not offer a math course at this time, students who need this credit are guided to appropriate courses at institutions close to their homes or to online programs.

In addition, critical analysis and reasoning are central skills required by all NLC courses. Students' first course, Educational Planning, helps students to develop the ability to analyze their own learning experiences and iterate them in a cohesive portfolio. In Introduction to Labor Studies, the second required course at the NLC, students read extensively, analyze the readings, and build unified essays that present reading comprehension skills within the context of their own union experiences. Many courses help students connect their own experiences in labor to the subject at hand to encourage full analysis of both study and experience. Additionally, the NLC's writing and science courses directly address logic and reasoning theories and give students the opportunity to experiment with these ideas in their essays and other assignments.

Effective research reveals solid critical thinking skills, and the NLC challenges students throughout its curriculum with many types of research projects, culminating in the Senior Project. Specific research instruction is a component of the senior block curriculum, English courses, and in Bibliography and Research, students learn about effective research methods, ultimately demonstrating their skills in a final project that assigns each student to specific occupations and asks them to prepare pertinent research projects. This type of real-world training encourages students to take their learning beyond the classroom.

It would be impossible for a student to graduate from the NLC without technological competency, since all courses rely on technology to deliver materials and assignments. In every course, students are required to access and use Blackboard, NLC's online learning software. Students must demonstrate skills in accessing the Internet, posting to discussion board, submitting assignments electronically, and, in some courses, taking online quizzes and surveys. To enhance technological skills, the College offers six courses specifically focused on helping students develop technology skills: Distance Learning for Labor Education, Computer Skills for Trade Unionists Levels I and II, Instructional Technology, Instructional Systems Design, Multimedia Technology. Additionally, Introduction to Digital Music challenges students' technology skills by engaging them to develop music.

Beyond the basic goals of general education, the NLC offers courses in the arts and humanities that focus on labor culture and social sciences classes that explore specific labor issues within a broader context. These courses challenge students to engage their cognitive abilities; infer connections among new information, their own experiences, and the world outside the classroom; and build new intellectual experiences that help them broaden their visions of the value of education. Courses like Images of Labor in Film, Writing about Labor and Literature, and Gender and Identity in Labor History challenge stereotypes and question conventional wisdom to help students look beyond generally accepted ideas to seek new truths. For students to understand the global demands of today's world, they need the skills to question assertions and the intellectual ability to establish and support their own conclusions; NLC courses build these skills.

The pilot BTPS has a clearly designed curriculum that addresses general education issues in both required courses and throughout the program. The BTPS requires that students earn 15 general education credits; when students do not have transfer credits in English, arts and humanities, mathematics, science, or social science, they are required to enroll in courses to fulfill these requirements. Students may take most of these courses through the NLC or enroll at institutions closer to home, if they prefer.

In a program that is entirely online, like the BTPS degree, oral communication is not emphasized; however, without traditional classroom discussions, the demand for solid writing skills becomes more intensive. Many online courses require student presentations and all engage the discussion board to build connections among students and to tap into the co-construction of knowledge that is more easily accessed in the traditional classroom setting. Although the oral aspects of communication are primarily simulated through regular posts and responses, telephone conversations and occasional conference calls are options available to help students learn.

Writing skills are central to every course in the BTPS program, as teachers engage the online learning technology's discussion board and, at times, the chat room. Courses challenge students to respond to questions connected to the learning goals each week, requiring them to practice writing in an informal environment. Many questions push students towards experimenting with ideas that they can engage for more formal assignments like essays, research papers, and presentations. Additionally, in fall 2008, the NLC challenged students to go beyond expository writing to experiment with poetry and fiction techniques in a new creative writing course.

In some BTPS courses, students test their scientific and quantitative reasoning skills. For example, in Science, Technology, and Our World, students learn how the principles of science operate in the world and learn to interpret and make value judgments about data and how to solve problems with math and science concepts. Online math courses have been experimented with, but currently a satisfactory solution has not been found; since many apprenticeships incorporate math courses, demand for courses to fulfill this requirement has been low, and student needs are resolved on a case-by-case basis.

Critical analysis and reasoning are key in most courses offered in the BTPS program, and training in these areas often overlap and support each other. For example, Science, Technology, and Our World teaches students how to use inductive and deductive reasoning as they engage the scientific method; this is supported by examination of logic and argument theory in Effective Writing. Seeking new ways to solve problems is common to many of the courses in the BTPS program. The capstone project highlights the skills students learn throughout their studies, demanding that students direct their critical thinking skills towards addressing a unique specialization and solving problems not previously addressed.

Since BTPS courses are delivered online, with no in-residence component, students must demonstrate technological competency in all of their courses. For students who wish to explore this area further, several online courses, for example, Multimedia Technology and Distance Learning for Labor Educators, are available. Additionally, the BTPS program offers students the chance to specialize in education technology with the Instructional Technology and Computer Skills specialization, available in two tracks.

The arts and humanities gain a unique focus in the BTPS program, as students have the option to specialize in music and the arts. Given the impact that music, fiction, poetry, and art have had on labor culture, this is a key area of study; although these courses focus on labor issues, they offer the same kind of intellectual challenges and connection building found in liberal arts colleges across the country.

Overall, the NLC has invested extensive resources, skills, and research into crafting two degree programs that solidly and creatively enhance students' general education proficiencies. In conjunction with specific general education requirements, the NLC has structured its degrees upon its commitment to students' intellectual development and their growth as leaders of the labor movement.

Fundamental Elements

Is There a Program of General Education or Does an Alternative Approach Fulfill the Intent of this Fundamental Element?

All students must complete 15 hours of general education that includes at least one three-credit course in each of five areas: English, humanities, mathematics, science, and social science. Since the NLC is an upper-division school, most students complete their general education requirement before enrolling. Advisors work with students to ensure that they

meet the general education requirements through transfer credits. Students who do not meet these requirements must take courses at the NLC (or at another school as transfer credit).

Are Skills and Abilities Developed in General Education Applied in the Major or Study in Depth?

All of the electives and courses in an area of concentration require competencies—leadership, critical thinking, effective communication, global thinking, information literacy and technological proficiency—which are developed in the general education courses. Additionally, the senior and capstone projects require that students demonstrate that they have highly refined these competencies.

Is the Study of Values, Ethics and Diverse Perspectives Incorporated into the General Education Program?

The NLC is educating students to be global and critical thinkers, so they can lead and communicate in diverse workplaces with people from different perspectives and sets of values. The general education courses offered by the College (particularly courses in theatre, film, literature, ethics, and history that can be used to fulfill a student's humanities requirement), along with the general education background NLC students enter with, incorporate the study of values, ethics and diverse perspectives in a manner that is consistent with the institutional mission and the competencies connected to that mission. In some courses, ethics is more specifically addressed, for example Ethics in Decision Making examines work issues in the light of ethical theories. Other courses tangentially address ethics, for example Labor Law, which looks at fair representation, and Leadership Theories, which discusses ethical leadership strategies; many other courses examine justice and fairness in the workplace in the context of their course objectives.

Are Graduating Students Proficient in Oral and Written Communication, Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning, Appropriate Technological Capabilities and Information Literacy?

The Learning Assessment Plan details how the NLC curriculum is designed to develop students' competency in communication skills, scientific and quantitative reasoning, and technological and information literacy. All courses emphasize general education competencies and measure student results through essays, presentations, and other assignments. By the time students reach their final semesters, they are well prepared for the senior or capstone project, which further tests students' capabilities: to complete the project successfully, students must acquire and demonstrate proficiency in all required competencies.

Are the General Education Requirements Clearly and Accurately Described in Official Publications of the Institution?

The general education requirements and policies are fully described in the Student Handbook, in the Course Catalog, and by advisors. Students learn about College requirements extensively in Educational Planning.

Are General Education Outcomes Assessed and Used for Curricular Improvement?

The College monitors general education competencies in Educational Planning to identify students with special needs. General education competencies are also required for success in

the College's other courses, which are writing, reading, and research-intensive. General education related competencies are continually monitored, assessed and improved throughout the NLC educational experience.

Recommendations for Improvement

Explore options for adding courses in college mathematics to help students fulfill this general education requirement.

Related Educational Activities

The institution's programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

Introduction

The NLC's degree programs are complemented by related educational activities that include partnerships with academic institutions and unions, an experiential learning program, the Union Skills certificate program, and several other activities. Issues such as basic skills and non-credit offerings are not relevant to the NLC's current program; the issue of branch campuses is addressed within a broader examination of academic and union partnership agreements. Distance or distributed learning has been discussed at greater length in Educational Offerings.

The NLC has pursued and implemented numerous partnerships with academic institutions and unions. Since many schools already have established labor studies departments, developing academic partners presents an efficient method for extending the College's limited resources and recruiting additional students. NLC students can attend institutions close to home and work towards completing their degrees, for example, enrolling in required courses like Educational Planning at Cornell or Introduction to Labor Studies at University of Illinois. Furthermore, by partnering with unions committed to investing in member education, the NLC can offer series of courses at alternative locations. For example, the partnership with the International Association of Machinists (IAMAW) lends the NLC an alternative campus at the IAMAW training center: a cohort of 15 to 25 students enrolls in three NLC courses two to three times each year. Additionally, the NLC formed the Kaiser Permanente Health Care Institute (KPHCI) in partnership with Kaiser Permanente. All programs are filed with the Maryland Higher Education Commission, which approves the courses.

The prior learning assessment process at the NLC incorporates challenging self assessment, extensive academic reflection, and writing. Students enroll in Educational Planning, a course that helps them unite all of their learning experiences into a documented portfolio that includes an educational resume, narrative, experiential learning essays, and copies of transcripts and other documents. The College's standards are clearly delivered during the weeks in residence and online, and students work closely with well trained faculty to develop high quality and complete portfolios. Portfolios are assessed by NLC faculty and administrators and are tracked and stored according to clear procedures and standards.

The NLC's four decades as a training center continue in its Union Skills certificate program. The Union Skills series trains union leaders to negotiate contracts, improve their apprenticeship and other educational programs through teaching techniques, build their

organizing skills, and study best practices in health and safety. Students can earn certificates in union administration, labor safety and health, organizing, labor education, or capital stewardship. Two building trades certificates are also available, as is a four-course health care certificate as a result of a partnership with Kaiser Permanente. The courses offered in the Union Skills program have been assessed for credit, and the courses often cause students to enroll in one of the NLC's degree programs.

Additionally, the NLC offers several special programs that are related to the overall educational mission of the College. The Southwest Organizing School makes NLC courses available in a convenient location for students in the southwest region of the U.S. Another program, the Rail Workers Hazardous Materials Training Program provides hazardous materials training for rail workers with courses on rail safety presented by peer instructors. Finally, the National Resource Center for OSHA is one of 19 OSHA training centers in the U.S.; some course offerings have been assessed for course credit and connect safety and health oriented students to the degree program.

All of the NLC's related educational programs tie directly to its mission to bring higher education to workers and prepare union representatives for the challenge of leadership in a global economy. Partnerships extend the NLC's reach and help recruit students. The experiential learning program teaches students to pull together all of the learning experiences into a cohesive degree. The Union Skills program serves to educate union leaders and often encourages students to enroll in the degree program. Other programs offer unique training and materials needed for the modern workplace.

Discussion

The NLC has implemented a clear process to assess experiential learning for credit. Extensive focus has been given to Maryland Higher Education Commission's recommendations, and evaluations managed by consultants are now handled by faculty and administrators. Students begin their studies at the NLC by enrolling in Educational Planning, a course offered during the week in residence each term, online, by academic partners, and in special cohorts for union partners. Offered broadly, since it is the initial requirement for an NLC degree, the course teaches students how to gather all of their learning experiences to create a portfolio that documents and unites coursework, training, transfer credit, military service, testing, and experiential learning. While the course assignments focus students on developing the required portfolio materials, the self reflection and extensive writing, research, and analysis that results from the development process enable students to grow and plan to complete their degrees.

Required courses at all schools are in demand during most terms, and colleges and universities often rely on adjunct professors to keep their scheduling of required courses flexible and accessible for students. In contrast, Educational Planning is primarily taught by full-time professors at the NLC; adjuncts who teach the course for NLC academic partners attend mandatory training sessions and receive regular updates about changes in policies. During the course, students gather transcripts and other records, prepare educational resumes, write narrative essays, and develop experiential learning essays. Students are advised

and gain an understanding about how apprenticeships, transfer credits, and military training fit into their NLC degrees, and they create degree plans to map out their progress towards graduation. While Educational Planning instructors guide and mentor students, emphasizing critical thinking skills and pushing students towards high quality academic writing, the final portfolio is submitted to Academic Services for evaluation. As all portfolios are evaluated by two central evaluators, the NLC achieves consistency and quality control in student portfolio assessment while continuing to honor other learning experiences.

The experiential learning program has grown and developed since it was first offered in the 1990s, enabling Educational Planning to blend several goals. Since this class reintroduces most NLC students to college, in addition to helping students benefit from experiential credits, a large part of its focus is to help students move forward with their academic careers. Educational Planning, as a required, introductory course, also initiates students into the challenges of academic study, preparing students for success in subsequent courses. The Learning Assessment Plan's core competencies shape this course, creating consistency across the program in areas such as writing and critical thinking. Since writing across the curriculum is central to learning at NLC, additional narrative writing and more substantial requirements have been established for the experiential learning essays.

The course is built around portfolio guidance materials prepared by Academic Services and organized in a three-ring binder. Dividers organize the sections, which include detailed instructions, minimum requirements, and samples. Preparatory charts (training chronology worksheets, life experience worksheets, and degree plan worksheets) help students gather material for their essays, and format instructions guide students towards professional presentation. The portfolio materials build consistency and help ensure that requirements are clear.

Educational Planning has been tied to the advising process to ensure that students are well aware of degree requirements and can build solid plans to complete their degrees in a sensible timeline. Before beginning Educational Planning, students benefit from pre-enrollment advising; as students move forward in the course, they learn from additional advising. Each student is personally advised in light of new information gathered through the portfolio work, and as transcripts and other documentation arrive in the registrar's office and are analyzed. Advisors help students to understand how many credits they have earned, what courses they need to take to meet degree requirements, and what additional work they need to do (i.e., requesting missing transcripts, enrolling in general education courses, or writing additional experiential essays to earn credits). Since each student brings a unique combination of transcripts, military training, apprenticeships, and training, each student needs careful, individualized guidance.

In another important change, the assessment process has moved from an outside evaluation consultant to evaluation by faculty and administration. In addition to careful review of students' learning experiences, as presented and documented in student portfolios, assessors analyze students' writing and critical thinking capabilities. Since both the evaluators and course instructors work closely with student writing, the course provides opportunities for identifying students who need extra support and those who have special potential that would benefit from additional guidance.

Fundamental Elements

Basic Skills

Are There Systematic Procedures for Identifying Students Who Are not Fully Prepared for College-Level Study?

Educational Planning, the NLC's initial required course, helps identify students who need special assistance in pursuing college-level study. Writing issues are frequently faced, and the concentrated writing projects that the course demands are designed to help professors determine which students may need additional help. Students who successfully complete the portfolio are well prepared to move on to additional courses. However, those students who do not complete their portfolios are not abandoned: follow-up procedures have been established to help students overcome the challenges blocking them from completing the work. Students who feel they do not need the portfolio may apply for exemption from this course.

The second required course, Introduction to Labor Studies challenges students to write a series of essays that demonstrate strong critical thinking skills; this course also helps identify students who need extra guidance. Students who cannot write at the academic level required are supported in several ways. In cases where the students simply need to be pointed towards revision and more careful thinking, instructors generally offer detailed feedback to push students towards more complete work. In more dire situations, however, students are referred to NLC writing courses, to courses close to the students' homes, and, in some cases, to direct one-on-one tutoring sessions with the College's English faculty.

Students who need additional proficiency to be able to enroll in required college-level courses are guided by advisors to enroll in appropriate courses at other schools. The College does not offer basic-level courses; however, it helps student to locate suitable programs for achieving academic success.

Is There Provision of Relevant Courses and Support Services for Admitted, Underprepared Students?

The pre-admissions advising process has greatly reduced the number of enrolled students who are not prepared for upper-level college work. Since an advisor contacts prospective students to help them decide if the NLC's program fits their educational needs, most students learn about the 56 credit hours required for admission. Students who are admitted provisionally are guided by their advisors to fulfill requirements at schools close to their homes or at the NLC as appropriate.

Additionally, the requirements of Educational Planning and Introduction to Labor Studies help professors see which students struggle with their writing. These students are encouraged to enroll in writing courses; for students with especially challenging writing issues, one-on-one tutoring is available. During the week in residence, faculty are available for in-person discussions of writing issues, and an online writing lab is planned for the future.

Are There Remedial or Pre-Collegiate Level Courses that Do Not Carry College Credit?

Although the NLC does not offer any remedial or pre-collegiate level courses, advisors refer students to colleges and educational programs in students' home communities that can provide those courses. All other courses offered by the NLC, including classes in the Union Skills program, have been assessed for credit. Students who wish to enroll in these courses may do so without formally enrolling in the College. Open Learning courses serve as samples of labor education courses offered.

Certificate Programs

Do Certificate Programs Have Clearly Articulated Expectations of Student Learning, and Are They Designed, Approved, Administered, and Periodically Evaluated Under Established Institutional Procedures?

Formerly the AFL-CIO Labor Studies Center, the NLC continues to offer the Union Skills program that has provided leadership training for workers active in the American labor movement for four decades. In keeping with that original mandate, NLC offers a wide range of leadership training and capacity-building courses in its Union Skills program. These courses address a range of training needs for union activists and educators and often serve as a bridge to additional learning opportunities for students. For example, a newly hired educator at an apprenticeship program might enroll in Teaching Techniques to learn how to improve his classroom presentations; later he might return as a degree seeking student interested in majoring in labor education.

During 2008, over 40 courses were scheduled as part of the college's Union Skills program. Typically, these courses are delivered in an intensive five-day, 40-hour week format. The core faculty of the NLC teaches the most of these courses, which have been assessed for credit and contribution to the Learning Assessment Plan. Certificates recognize successful completion of 12 credits in specific areas like union administration, labor safety and health, organizing, labor education, and capital stewardship; building trades certificates are also available; all have been submitted to the Maryland Commission for Higher Education for review. Since these courses can be used as credits in the degree program, they are evaluated and assessed by the academic standards developed for the degree classes.

The Union Skills program is an important part of achieving the NLC's mission to help labor leaders prepare for the challenges of union leadership in the 21st century. Additionally, it serves as union members' introduction to the NLC degree program.

Do Certificate Programs Have Published Program Objectives, Requirements, and Curricular Sequence?

Details about the Union Skills program and the certificates offered and their requirements are published in the NLC Course Catalog and on the website. Although curricular sequence is not emphasized, each certificate has specific, clearly explained requirements. Several certificates fulfill certain requirements within NLC degree program majors.

Are Certificate Programs Consistent with National Criteria?

The National Resource Center (NRC) for OSHA Training, which is a consortium of the NLC, The Center to Protect Workers' Rights/Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO, and West Virginia University, offers a series of safety courses that are consistent with national criteria. As one of 19 OSHA Education Centers in the U.S., the NRC offers safety courses as required by OSHA. Courses are regularly reviewed by OSHA representatives.

Do Certificate Programs Have Available and Effective Student Support Services?

NLC certificate programs benefit from the strong student support services offered to all NLC students, as described in detail in Standard 9. Specific support staff are assigned consistently to help program leaders ensure that student needs are met, whether the courses are offered at the NLC campus or off site.

Are Certificate Program Courses Comparable and Transferable to the Degree Program?

All courses offered by the NLC have been assessed for credit and fit within the Learning Assessment Plan and mission statement. Students who return to the NLC to pursue a bachelor's degree after earning certificates or even taking just one course may apply their earned credit to their degrees.

Experiential Learning

Does Credit Awarded for Experiential Learning Require an Evaluation of the Level, Quality, and Quantity of that Learning?

Credit awarded to students for experiential learning results from careful evaluation of the level, quality, and quantity of the students' learning. To qualify for experiential credential evaluation, students enroll in Educational Planning and complete an intense portfolio process that yields clearly written, documented essays that demonstrate student learning as it compares to similar coursework. Experiential essays demand a combination of critical thinking skills: comparison and contrast, analysis, and argument. Successful essays reveal effective communications skills as students present what they learned from their experiences and how they applied their learning to new situations. The detail and length required in these essays enables the evaluators to understand the students' learning experience and compare it to the rigorous requirements of similar courses within the evaluators' areas of expertise.

Are There Published and Implemented Policies and Procedures Defining the Methods by Which Prior Learning Can Be Evaluated, as well as the Level and Amount of Credit Available by Evaluation?

The NLC publishes and follows clear procedures for experiential credential evaluation; students can find details in the Student Handbook; students enrolled in Educational Planning can access materials in the online classroom and receive a portfolio with instructions, requirements, and examples. Included in these materials, and in the College Course Catalog, are policies delineating requirements and limits for experiential learning. For example, students may earn up to 30 credits from experiential learning assessment; no more than 15 credits can be in any one area, and students may not meet general education

requirements through experiential learning credits. Additionally, the published materials clarify that students are not eligible for experiential credits unless they successfully complete Educational Planning, which is designed to ensure that students understand how experiential evaluation works at the NLC. The level of credit is ascertained by evaluators with expertise in curriculum requirements and in comparison between experiential learning results and specific college courses.

Do the Published and Implemented Policies and Procedures Regarding the Award of Credit for Prior Learning Define the Acceptance of Such Credit Based on the Institution's Curricula and Standards?

The published and implemented policies and procedures for experiential credit are directly tied to the NLC's curriculum and standards. As an institution committed to making education available to working people and recognizing the learning experiences outside the classroom, the NLC's prior learning program allows students to document years of study, training, and learning and earn college credit for learning they achieved outside of specific courses. Since students write detailed essays comparing their learning to specific college courses relevant to their degrees, their experiential credits complement the College's curriculum.

Are There Published and Implemented Procedures Regarding the Recording of Evaluated Prior Learning by the Awarding Institution?

The College relies on criteria established by the American Council on Education and other nationally recognized third-party assessors which are published and made available to students, primarily through the Educational Planning course. Academic Services has established clear administrative procedures for recording evaluated prior learning portfolios, entering information into the student information system, storing completed portfolios, and following up with students who have not fulfilled the requirements.

Is Credit Awarded Appropriate to the Subject and the Degree Context into Which It Is Accepted?

Credit earned through experiential learning is appropriate and connected to the labor studies majors available at the NLC. Many students earn experiential credits through their union service, which is directly applicable to the degrees awarded at NLC. Since students can earn up to 30 credits in experiential learning, and the entire amount of transfer credit and experiential learning combined is capped at 90 credits, the final courses in a student's major, including the Senior Project, set the context for the student's degrees.

Are the Evaluators of Experiential Learning Knowledgeable About the Subject Matter and About the Institution's Criteria for the Granting of College Credit?

NLC evaluators are faculty or teaching administrators who are knowledgeable about the institution's prior learning policies and about the College curriculum as a whole; other faculty members offer their expertise as needed in particular cases. Policies for hiring specialists to evaluate courses outside the College faculty's expertise are described in the experiential learning materials.

Other Instructional Sites

Do Courses Delivered at Other Locations Meet Standards Comparable to those of Other Institutional Offerings?

NLC courses are periodically delivered off site to accommodate the schedules and locations of working students. In many cases, the courses are presented by the same instructors who teach them on the NLC campus, and the contact hours and quality of the courses are equivalent. Additionally, the support services provided are nearly identical, as students register through the NLC online student registration system; in some cases, students benefit from having additional support provided by the hosting partner. All courses follow the same academic standards as on-campus courses, and syllabi are reviewed by the Academic Standards and Curriculum Committees to ensure appropriate fit within the Learning Assessment Plan.

Distance Learning

Do Distance Learning Offerings Meet Institution-Wide Standards for Quality of Instruction, Articulated Expectations of Student Learning, Academic Rigor, and Educational Effectiveness?

The Bachelor of Technical/Professional Studies (BTPS) is a fully online degree being piloted by the NLC; it is designed to deliver high quality instruction with clear student learning expectations to working people unable to attend even the short week-in-residence program offered by the NLC bachelor of arts degree. Many BA students also enroll in courses designed for this fully online program, so they can continue to learn during semesters when they cannot attend week-in-residence courses. All online courses are designed to be academically rigorous, and course surveys have shown that they are highly effective in helping students to learn. To ensure quality of instruction and student assessment, all course syllabi must be reviewed by the Academic Standards and Curriculum Committees. A Distance Education Steering Committee has been developed to oversee quality control of the program.

Are the Offerings via Distance Learning Consistent with the Institution's Mission and Goals, and the Rationale for the Distance Learning Delivery?

The NLC degree program began with a low-residency degree supported by online learning, and students found it an effective way to combine work, family, and union activism with a formal educational program. When fully online courses became available, designed to reach students who need even more educational flexibility, the NLC was able to offer a new medium to bring education to working people. Online courses and the BTPS online degree fit within the NLC's overall mission.

Are Applicable Legal and Regulatory Requirements Considered in Planning?

The applicable legal and regulatory requirements were considered in the planning for the College's distance and distributed learning program.

Is There Demonstrated Program Coherence, Including Stated Program Learning Outcomes Appropriate to the Rigor and Breadth of the Degree Awarded?

The distance learning program of study at the College is an integral part of its curriculum; all courses begin online and require significant online learning components. The coherence of the NLC program, and the rigor and breadth of the degree, are inseparable its distance learning aspects.

Is There Demonstrated Commitment to Continuation of Offerings for a Period Sufficient to Enable Admitted Students to Complete the Degree in a Publicized Timeframe?

The NLC has been providing the bachelor's degree program with the same areas of concentration, and many of the same individual courses, consistently over the past ten years and will continue to do so. New courses are regularly developed, and the degree program continues to grow with the addition of the fully online BTPS degree.

Is There Assurance that Arrangements with Consortial Partners or Contractors Do Not Compromise the Integrity of the Institution or of the Educational Offerings?

Partnership agreements ensure that agreements do not compromise institutional integrity. Each partnership is verbalized in a memorandum of agreement that stipulates the roles, rights, and responsibilities of the NLC and its partner to ensure that the College's integrity is maintained.

Is There Validation by Faculty of Course Materials or Technology-Based Resources Developed Outside the Institution?

All courses presented by the NLC are reviewed by the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committees to ensure that all courses fit within the Learning Assessment Plan and the mission of the College. Most courses are developed by NLC faculty; any external resources used involve only design and delivery methods.

Are There Available, Accessible, and Adequate Learning Resources Appropriate to the Offerings at a Distance?

The library offers several online databases to help students with research projects, along with an interlibrary loan program that enables students to access materials through their public library systems. The library catalog is available online, and students also have access to the Maryland Digital Library and EBSCOhost. Training and research materials are also available, and librarians are available by telephone and email to assist students with research questions.

Is There an Ongoing Program of Appropriate Orientation, Training, and Support for Faculty Participating in Electronically Delivered Offerings?

Courses are delivered on Blackboard, and faculty and students receive instruction on using the software. When new versions of the software are released, extensive training sessions are available to help faculty design and set up courses; staff experts have developed tutorials and other help information to enable faculty to learn specialized aspects of the software.

Are There Adequate Technical and Physical Plant Facilities, Including Appropriate Staffing and Technical Assistance, to Support Electronic Offerings?

The NLC's Kirkland Center provides high-end technical needs, including a computer lab. All other buildings are wired for network access, including dormitories, and a computer lab is in great demand in and outside of class time. Additionally, the Center for Advanced Instructional Technology (CAIT) specializes in multimedia design and offers support to faculty and partner unions.

Do Contractual Relationships with Affiliated Providers, Other Institutions, or Organizations Protect the Accredited Institution's Integrity and Assure Appropriate Oversight?

Partnership are delineated clearly by memoranda of agreement to ensure that proper oversight is established and integrity is maintained. Agreements give the College direct responsibility for the academic content and quality of instruction for all courses that are part of any closed cohort arrangement, and the content and instruction of these courses were reviewed at the time the initial arrangements were made. Affiliate partners are required to obtain NLC approval before instituting any substantive changes.

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and appropriate higher education goals.

Introduction

Evaluating student learning at the NLC involves examination of the stated goals of the institution and the programs that deliver opportunities for students to learn and fulfill these goals. The College mission is to meet the educational needs of working men and women; this section examines how the College is meeting students' learning needs and how their learning is assessed. To prepare this report, the working group collected and reviewed course syllabi and learning objectives, examined the Learning Assessment Plan and mission statement, considered the role of student evaluations in course assessment, surveyed graduates, and discussed student assessment practices with faculty and staff.

The Learning Assessment Plan bridges the College mission statement and the learning objectives described in the individual course syllabi. Under the direction of the Faculty Senate, Curriculum Committee, and the Academic Standards Committee, all courses are required to engage some or all of the core competencies: leadership, critical thinking, effective communication, global thinking, information literacy, and technological proficiency. The Learning Assessment Plan delineates how these institutional-level goals connect to courses, and faculty develop these connections in their syllabi to ensure that students understand the learning expectations of individual courses. Furthermore, syllabi are required to present details about requirements and standards for evaluation.

Since the NLC does not use standardized testing—and, in fact, rarely tests students through traditional means—faculty use qualitative methods to measure students' learning. NLC students write more than students at traditional institutions with requirements similar to a good liberal arts college. Student achievement of course objectives are gauged through interaction and communication between faculty and student, resulting in individualized assessments that fit within course and curriculum goals. Additionally, this allows evaluation to be customized according to student needs, enabling faculty to help students succeed, while following through with institutional learning objectives. Since the College maintains small classes, faculty are able to work closely with students in both written and oral communications, formally and informally, investing energy into assessing students' projects, papers, and presentations and offering extensive feedback. Student ideas and their opinions are shared during this collaboration, which helps faculty re-evaluate courses and teaching strategies to ensure they are working well.

The central measure of students' achievement at the NLC is their ability to express their critical thinking skills in writing. Every point in students' progress towards the degree—from application and admission to the final revision of the Senior Project—focuses on students' abilities to think through complex ideas and capture their ideas in writing. While course goals are shared in group settings, either through online or classroom delivery, and group discussion and interaction yield dramatic results in the co-construction of knowledge within the community of students (along with numerous opportunities for faculty to gauge students' understanding and ability to apply course concepts), most students are assessed through detailed, interactive faculty response to their written assignments. Faculty review of students' essays pushes students to learn from strengths and weaknesses in both logic and writing structure and style; in some cases, extensive revision and resubmission are required to encourage students to reach new levels in their learning and to apply this learning from course to course.

Communication and collaboration between College representatives and students is the second key component in the College's student assessment. From the first telephone call or email to the conferring of the degree, staff and faculty are closely involved in student progress. Guidance begins with the students' first inquiry: staff and/or faculty respond with answers to questions and information about course plans, helping students to understand the program requirements. Before students choose their first courses, a faculty advisor works with them to make prudent and productive choices geared toward their success and learning growth. Collaboration continues as students enroll and build their degree plans through formal advising sessions that serve the dual purposes of supporting students and assessing their progress.

Additionally, students actively participate in course assessment through end-of-course surveys, which are presented during the week in residence or online. The results of these evaluations are reported to the provost and course instructor. Examination of students' views of strengths and weaknesses can then be used to improve the courses. Courses are also reviewed by the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committees, which examine all proposed courses and the curriculum as a whole and report to the faculty at the monthly faculty meeting.

Discussion

The central tools to assess student learning are writing and communication. Nearly every course at the NLC assigns significant writing and presentation projects and requires students to work closely with their instructors. As a result of collaboration between students and instructors, faculty are able to gauge students' learning needs and help them individually to achieve new levels of expertise in critical thinking and writing and other core competencies. Additionally, the results of student projects enable faculty to re-evaluate assignments, focusing and adjusting the objectives as needed. Each course at NLC has stated objectives in its syllabus, and individual student assessments and grades reflect student achievement of these learning objectives; the College recently revised its grading policy from pass/fail to letter grades. Courses at NLC are small and interactive to promote active learning.

Faculty members often return papers with comments and require resubmission to ensure that the end product reflects successful understanding of pertinent core competencies. This multiple review of student work is the exception, not the rule, in most institutions. If serious writing deficiencies persist, an English professor works one-on-one with the students and their work to improve the writing and critical thinking skills involved. Additionally, students are supported by librarians to better prepare for writing term papers and researching their thesis work.

As students progress through the NLC degree programs, their learning is measured through writing and communication:

Application and Admission. The application process requires students to demonstrate basic writing and computer skills: students who fail to meet general education requirements may still be admitted, but are guided towards courses that will bring their learning in line with expectations. Since the College's goal is to help working men and women achieve their educational aspirations, and its faculty and administration recognize that in many cases workers have not written academically for years or even decades, students who enter the College with writing challenges receive particular attention. When the College cannot support these students through its junior-level composition courses, they become eligible for intensive one-on-one tutoring. If learning disabilities are suspected to be the root of the writing issues, students are guided to solicit counseling and further support from an external resource. Until the admissions assessment component is actively used, introductory courses serve as the first writing evaluation.

Complementing the writing assessment is the advisors' role in guiding students. Since student applications require transcripts and records of other accredited training, like apprenticeships and military service, student advisors are able to ascertain students' educational progress before they begin their courses. Since every student's educational background is unique, one-on-one counseling helps students gain an understanding of how their educational histories fit into the NLC's learning goals. Understanding if a student has completed general education requirements and how long a student has been away from academic pursuits helps faculty and staff to advise the students toward a successful course of study. Enhancing the advising process has improved student success: according to the 2008 Graduate Survey, 92 percent of graduates were satisfied or very satisfied with advising, and faculty report improved course placement.

Educational Planning. The first required course at the NLC, Educational Planning relies on a portfolio system to collect and document the history of students' learning to help them plan for completing their degrees. Students are guided through a minimum of five written assignments that examine their experiences and learning: an educational resume, narrative, and three experiential essays. Designed to assess students on several levels—from transfer credit review to critical thinking and writing skills—the course helps students understand the degree program and aids them in analyzing their experiences in terms of college-level learning. Professors and reviewers work closely with students to help them write academic essays that connect their experience and learning to specific, accredited college courses.

In addition to allowing an initial assessment of writing skills, Educational Planning formalizes the advising relationships, and during course time students meet with faculty

advisors. While pre-admissions advising is managed by a central faculty member, Educational Planning assigns each student to a specific faculty member who will serve as the student's degree-plan advisor. Students and advisors meet for a lengthy analysis of how apprenticeships, transfer credits, partnership courses, and other fulfilled requirements work towards fulfilling NLC requirements and work out a plan for course enrollment in upcoming terms. This conversational assessment is recorded in the student file, which is updated at regular advising sessions. Additionally, students work with their professors through discussion, discussion board postings, and individual consultations to ensure that they are making appropriate progress and that special needs are well supported.

Majors & Specializations. A significant portion of the courses required at the NLC are part of the six majors in the bachelor of arts program and the four specializations of the BTPS; these courses contribute significantly to the assessment of students. Students are assessed as they progress through each major/specialization to ensure that they attain the learning objectives. Four courses and an elective are required for each major/specialization, and students must focus on their majors with their senior/capstone projects. Professors assess students primarily on their written work, but, as in all areas of the NLC program, communication and collaboration between faculty and students is a key element of the assessment process. As students participate in class meetings, post to the discussion board, and discuss essays and concepts individually with their teachers, professors are able to assess progress and guide students towards continued improvement.

Senior & Capstone Projects. NLC's final projects offer substantial evidence of students' higher-level critical thinking and writing skills: they are assessed by at least two readers to ensure that each project represents the student's finest skills in analysis and academic writing. Working individually and collaborating with an advisor, students prepare proposals for original research and writing that relates to their major; conduct research; and write an extended analysis of the results. Each student works intensely with a thesis advisor to produce a high quality project, often involving primary data collection and analysis along with a literature review and detailed methodology.

Senior project/capstone advisors serve as the first readers, working closely with students to ensure learning objectives are met; when the projects are complete, second readers review anonymous versions of the projects. If the readers' assessments do not agree, a third reader reviews the students' work.

While the primary assessment is the paper, collaboration and communication are essential to enable faculty to assess students' progress as they research and write, and, once projects are completed, many students extend this element to the broader community through presentations and application of their learning to their unions. Every year students present the findings of their research at such professional meetings as the Labor and Employment Relations Association, the American Public Health Association, and the United Association for Labor Education. Many students use the results of their papers to enhance their trade union work. A student in 2007 tested an idea he had for improved apprentice recruitment: the idea was adopted by his local, and he earned a promotion and a raise for his work. Another 2007 student used his paper to develop a grievance filing manual for shop stewards in his grand lodge to improve grievance handling for members. A third 2007 student developed a detailed proposal to put labor art murals on passenger bus shelters in Boise,

Idaho; it resulted in a city government grant for the murals. According to the 2008 Graduate Survey, 76.7 percent of graduates reported that they were able to apply elements of their Senior Projects to the labor movement.

Student course evaluations offer faculty a way to measure the success of their courses. Each faculty member, as well as the provost, receives the results of course evaluations that student complete on the last day of class for week-in-residence courses or in the final week for online courses. These evaluations are critical in the continuous improvement of curriculum, as well as other aspects of College life. Faculty and administrators review the results of student evaluations carefully, seeking information to improve courses and the overall experience at the College.

Faculty and administration interact intensely with students, so course evaluation continues outside of the formal evaluations. Besides the individual work faculty have carried out to improve their own courses, as a result of both informal and formal evaluations, significant improvements are evident in the expanded curriculum offerings—fully online courses, safety and health courses, and political economy curricula, in particular, have grown extensively. Many of the new courses and programs result from discussion with students about the learning they need to do their jobs well.

Experiential learning assessment is directly related to student performance in NLC degree programs. Educational Planning is the initial requirement; this course focuses on helping students develop an experiential learning portfolio for assessment. Under the guidance of faculty members, students in Educational Planning develop portfolios to document previous nontraditional college-level learning. These are carefully reviewed by Academic Services to assess learning for which credit can be given. In the process of developing their portfolios, students are advised about curriculum and courses that will maximize their college learning experiences.

Since the NLC is a degree completion college, evaluation of experiential learning is key to providing counsel to students on their degree program work. Many students write experiential essays that focus on areas of expertise that will complement their degrees and enable them to learn more. While experiential credits do not apply towards major requirements, they can enable students to move towards more challenging courses. For example, a student planning to major in labor education might write an experiential essay that demonstrates learning equivalent to a required major course, allowing room in the student's schedule to enroll in an unfamiliar course and expand learning opportunities. Additionally, the portfolio process serves as a self-study, allowing the students to build connection among the many kinds of learning they have experienced.

The portfolios serve as reasonable predictors for students' success. Those who put together strong, well written portfolios, generally are successful in their coursework. Students who struggle to compose the required materials and fail to apply the revisions and strategies presented by their instructors are not as successful in later courses. However, the NLC offers generous extensions and tutoring assistance to help even struggling learners to complete their portfolios and move on to the next level of courses, where they continue to receive careful attention. Assessment of the portfolios combined with faculty attention to

the student drafting process also enables faculty and administrators to encourage students to enroll in writing and critical thinking courses.

Most NLC graduates confirm that earning their degrees has resulted in a greater professional achievement; many have pursued graduate degrees, have shifted their careers in a new direction, or have enhanced their career contributions. Beyond professional achievement, many students comment on their personal growth and the impact their education has in inspiring spouses, children, co-workers, and others to seek continued growth through education.

In addition to a graduate survey that examines the impact of NLC degrees on students, students' relationships to the NLC are strong and productive, enabling faculty and staff to remain aware of student achievements that relate directly to the degrees they earned at the NLC. For example, in the fall of 2007, faculty hosted a panel at the American Public Health Association meetings; alumni who specialized in health and safety participated in the panel and shared how health and safety audits developed in an NLC senior paper had been incorporated into safety and health work throughout the water and waste water facilities in Trinidad and Tobago; additional work led to a successful update of health and safety laws in Trinidad and Tobago.

Anecdotally, the NLC has recorded scores of successes:

- Many students move on to leadership roles in trade union activities (many move to union staff jobs; many run for elected leadership office or for higher office than they previously had; many write to tell how their learning made them more effective trade unionists).
- Some take on new careers—especially those in physically demanding professions who retire early and are looking for a new direction.
- Many go to graduate school: faculty have written numerous recommendations for students to attend law school and a range of master's degree programs, including MBAs.
- Students tell of the deep self-fulfillment of earning bachelor's degrees. Many tell of the inspiration it has brought within their families for the children of the graduates.

According to the 2008 Graduate Survey, 80.6 percent of graduates indicated that their degrees positively their careers: 12.4 percent moved up in their international or local, 8.5 percent were enabled to pursue a new labor career, and 59.7 percent found their degrees helped them better serve the labor movement. Of graduates who applied to graduate or law school, all felt well prepared for the graduate challenge.

Student learning assessment is conceptually well integrated into institutional assessment criteria and activities. The Learning Assessment Plan connects the mission statement to core learning objectives within the program as a whole and within individual courses. Faculty and administration regularly review student learning, student needs, and student assessments to improve academic offerings and other aspects of College life.

Core learning objectives are measured by faculty evaluation of student work within courses, and the results of student learning—their application of what they learn at the NLC—are evident in the work that students do in the labor movement. The 2008 Graduate Survey indicated how graduates rate the importance of NLC course competencies in their work and how well the NLC prepared them in these areas:

- 93.8 percent found leadership skills to be important in their careers; 90 percent felt the NLC contributed a great deal to these skills.
- 97.7 percent found critical thinking skills to be important in their careers; 88.5 percent felt the NLC contributed a great deal to these skills.
- 97.7 percent found communication skills to be important in their careers; 97 percent felt the NLC contributed a great deal to these skills.
- 85.3 percent found data analysis skills to be important in their careers; 80.4 percent felt the NLC contributed a great deal to these skills.
- 83.7 percent found technology skills to be important in their careers; 68.7 percent felt the NLC contributed a great deal to these skills.

Additionally, 95.3 percent of graduates indicated that they would be very likely to recommend the program to colleagues.

Fundamental Elements

Are the Articulated Expectations of Student Learning Consonant with the Mission and with the Standards of Higher Education?

The NLC's mission presents two clear educational goals: bringing higher education to workers and preparing union representatives for the challenge of leadership in the global economy. The Learning Assessment plan analyzes this mission in terms of learning objectives and presents key competencies that are crucial to realizing the individual aspirations of workers and preparing union representatives for leadership in the global economy. The NLC educates students as leaders, critical thinkers, effective communicators, global thinkers, and information literate and technologically proficient individuals. Each course addresses aspects of these core competencies in its syllabus, as required and reviewed by the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committees.

Is There a Plan that Describes Student Learning Assessment Activities, and Does the Plan Include the Specific Methods to be Used to Validate Articulated Student Learning Goals and Objectives?

The Learning Assessment Plan details assessment activities and includes specific methods to validate articulated learning goals. The plan addresses the assessment of individual student competencies including application, Educational Planning, portfolio assessment, advising, faculty assessment, and the senior/capstone projects. Additionally, the plan describes the assessment of individual courses in an effort to insure that all courses contribute to helping students achieve the core competencies; this includes student evaluations, committee review, and faculty sub-group meetings.

Is There Evidence that Student Learning Assessment Information Is Used to Improve Teaching and Learning?

The Learning Assessment Plan details the feedback loops for using assessment information to improve teaching and learning. Faculty re-evaluate courses based on student evaluations and the results of student assignments. Discussions among faculty who teach the same courses or work together in courses focus on improving teaching and learning.

Is There Documentation that Student Learning Assessment Information Is Used as Part of Institutional Assessment?

The 2008 Graduate Survey suggested that the NLC program has proven successful when judged by the extrinsic criteria of graduate school admissions and professional advancement. Over 21 percent of the responding graduates are in process of obtaining an additional degree since completing their studies at the NLC, and all felt well to adequately prepared. In addition, over 35 percent of the responding graduates report that they have been promoted or changed jobs since graduating. This information suggests that the Learning Assessment Plan is effectively guiding the student assessment process.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Develop an online and week-in-residence writing lab
2. Revise the student evaluation form to address the core competencies described in the Learning Assessment Plan and consider additional evaluation of week-in-residence courses after the online portion is completed.
3. Improve the response rate for online end-of-course surveys.