Improving Board Oversight of Student Learning Outcomes
Project Overview

Fulfillment of the institution’s mission is a fiduciary responsibility of governing boards, and educational quality is the heart of the mission. Board awareness of this mission has grown alongside institutional attention to student learning assessment, yet AGB’s recent study found that 62% of boards report they do not spend enough time in board meetings on student learning outcomes. To encourage and support their efforts, the AGB Statement on Board Responsibility for the Oversight of Educational Quality was released in 2011, and AGB is launching a demonstration project on boards’ efforts to help ensure educational quality at their institutions.

The Association of Governing Boards, with the support of the Teagle Foundation, will engage eight to ten diverse institutions, state systems and their boards in an 18-month effort to identify appropriate board-level metrics. These metrics shall be related to student learning and effective governance practices to focus the board’s oversight of educational quality. During that time, AGB will convene teams from the participating institutions at the start and near completion of the project term, and will also provide them with additional periodic consultation as they work to identify effective metrics and strategies for board engagement. At the conclusion of the project, we will ask teams to report on their progress, paying particular attention to what works and the obstacles and difficulties they encountered. This is a unique opportunity for a select group of institutions and their boards to collaborate with other exemplar institutions on a challenging, yet essential issue.

As part of this effort, AGB will ask institutions to complete the following tasks:

- Form an institutional project team of three to four people to lead this effort. That team should include the primarily campus liaison to the academic affairs committee of the board (often the chief academic officer), as well as at least one board member, and the campus director of assessment. The team may include others as well, including faculty leaders and the individual responsible for undergraduate education, if not the chief academic officer. Senior leadership will be key to the success of this effort;
- Send the team of three to four people to a full-day kickoff project meeting, and then send one or two individuals of the team to a final project meeting;
- Engage in pre-meeting and post-meeting work related to identifying and refining board-level metrics;
- Develop strategies to engage the board in ensuring educational quality, including rethinking the work of the Academic Affairs Committee of the board, if it exists;
- Share metrics and strategies used to engage the board in monitoring performance in student learning with the other participating institutions and for potential national dissemination;
- Provide brief written progress reports on strategies of success and less successful efforts to engage the board in educational quality oversight, as well as there being several opportunities for institutional teams to have project check-ins, primarily electronically, to discuss progress and challenges they face along the course of the project.
AGB, in turn, will support the institutions’ participation in the following ways:

- Issue a press release about selection into this competitive, national program.
- Reimburse the institutions for the onsite costs associated with the participation of a team in various project meetings;
- Provide expert consultation as well as consistent feedback on metrics and engagement strategies;
- Highlight institutional efforts and contributions in AGB publications and via its website, and spotlight exemplary practices and outcomes at the 2013 National Conference on Trusteeship;

The project is led by Ellen Chaffee, Senior Advisor, AGB as well as Peter Eckel, AGB’s Vice President for Governance and Leadership Programs. The advisory committee members are Peter Ewell (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems), Stan Ikenberry (National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment), George Kuh (National Institute for Student Learning Outcomes Assessment), David Paris (New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability), Kenneth “Buzz” Shaw (president emeritus, Syracuse University), and Beverly Tatum (president, Spelman College).

For additional information about this project, please contact its co-directors, Ellen Chaffee at (701-840-1780) ellen.chaffee@gmail.com or Peter Eckel at (202-776-0829) or Peter@agb.org.

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