Increased Institutional Effectiveness through Program Review, Integrated Planning, and Resource Allocation

Exercise I: An Institution without Program Review and Integrated Planning
The Case of Mountain Shadows College

Instructions: Read the following case study and answer the questions at the end.

Findings from Standard I.B and II.A, II.B Review:
Mountain Shadows College (MSC) does not have an ongoing, systematic program review that is integrated with planning, and resource allocation used to demonstrate how well it is achieving its mission and stated goals to make decisions regarding improving educational quality and institutional effectiveness as required in Standard I.B. Since 2000, the process itself has been modified several times. While the current program review process is an improvement over previous versions, it still lacks data on student achievement and student learning. Furthermore, the few program reviews that have been completed have not been used to drive any decision-making by the College Council or Budget committee (the two key decision-making bodies on campus). There is a requirement that a program can only request additional faculty positions if it has a program review on file. It is not clear whether this requirement is simply a compliance requirement or whether the information in the program reviews actually drive resource allocation decisions. Often, programs not requesting additional positions do not complete the reviews.

Classes and programs are on-going and are providing instruction to students; however, the program review process does not analyze student attainment of learning outcomes or student achievement in an “ongoing or systematic” way. MSC has no systematic, data-driven process to inform decision-making and allocate resources. One department prepared a “data report” as a measure to save their program from proposed budget cuts, but it did not evaluate the program’s effectiveness in achieving its intended outcomes and planning for improvement. Despite numerous attempts to refine the program review process, there is no obvious policy/procedure for completing program reviews, no schedule of planned reviews, and no clear understanding of the intended use or analysis of the review once it is completed. There is no individual or committee charged with oversight of the process.

Student learning outcomes at the course level have been defined for most courses. Programmatic and institutional outcomes are not well defined or agreed upon by the faculty and other academic staff. Similarly, considerable work remains to be done to determine assessment methods.

Although student support services are provided by a dedicated staff, student services as a whole lacks an organized or integrated process of evaluation, priority setting, planning, resource allocation, and re-evaluation. Some programs have conducted program reviews and student learning outcomes have been developed for some areas in student services; however, there is no consistency to these reviews, and difficulties with data accessibility severely limit modifications or improvements to the services provided to students. The reviews are not used to link services to student needs.
Findings from Standard III Review:
A recurring concern is the limited extent to which physical, technology, human, and financial resource planning is integrated into institutional planning. In the absence of an overall campus educational master plan to frame resource allocation decisions, many decisions are made on an ad hoc basis. For example, a decision was made to repurpose the technology center to become a gymnasium; that decision was later reversed. Furthermore, while the College has a plan to replace computers on campus, it has been almost impossible to adhere to the plan. Computers were initially purchased with bond funds, but an institutional line item for ongoing replacement is lacking. Class schedules were not reduced at the level dictated by state workload/funding reductions, yet there were also no plans developed for how to support the classes without adequate state funding.

MSC has many challenges:

- MSC has lagged behind in writing course, program, and institutional student learning outcomes.
- There is a lack of quantitative and qualitative data that measures student achievement and student learning.
- Where data are available, there are insufficient resources to analyze the data for the purpose of reflection and dialog by the College.
- There is an inadequate research office to support understanding of the data that the College does collect.
- Integrated planning is fragmented.
- Resource allocation appears to be based on “the last person to visit the budget committee with a request for funds.”

Questions for Discussion:

1. What should MSC do to improve its program review process? What things should be done first?

2. Where would you begin reconstructing MSC’s planning process? Why would you begin there?

3. Is “new resources available” the only reasonable incentive for MSC’s faculty and staff to engage in program review and planning?