

Assessment Network of New York's 2015 Annual Conference

By Don Sutherland

The Assessment Network of New York's third annual conference was held at the scenic Mercy College campus in Dobbs Ferry, New York from April 29 through May 1. Outside the Hudson River, the Palisades, and spring warmth were inviting. Inside, the content from a wide array of presentations and workshops was even more enticing. Topics included an introduction to the new Middle States standards, the use of student learning evidence to improve Higher Education, the use of assessment data to increase the urgency of change on campus, and linking academic and unit assessment to build an institutional report card. Some of those topics will be discussed in forthcoming editions of this blog.

The [Assessment Network of New York](#) (ANNY) has just become a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Its mission is to "Advance the quality assessment of institutional effectiveness and to enhance the success of institutions of higher education and their students in New York State." ANNY is governed and run by volunteers from New York State's colleges and universities.

Today, American Higher Education faces an array of challenges and demands from diverse constituents ranging from federal policy makers to the general public. A common theme that ties these challenges and demands together is the need for change. That perspective will be the starting point for the several blog entries related to the just-concluded ANNY annual conference.

During the conference, Dr. Lion F. Gardner, Professor Emeritus in Zoology from Rutgers University provided results from a study in which a mean of respondents from two- and four-year institutions indicated that 47.8% of graduating degree recipients are highly educated. Participants also felt that a "reasonable and acceptable minimum percentage" should be 77.9%. The gap between present outcomes and desired performance was large. He also noted that a sense of complacency was not uncommon despite that gap. In short, the survey results highlighted a strong need for change.

In that context, a relevant question concerns whether accreditors can act as a change agent. The ANNY Conference provided some positive evidence that proactive and engaged accreditors can, in fact, stimulate positive change.

If one uses the conference presentations as a proxy for change, one can argue that MSCHE played a part as a change agent. Excluding vendor presentations, presentations by non-MSCHE institutions, and specialized content (e.g. library studies among multiple institutions), there were 16 schools that made one or more presentations.

Among the 16 schools making presentations, 10 (62.5%) received a follow-up request on their most recent self-study or periodic review report. An additional 4 institutions received no follow-up requests on their most recent accreditation reports, but had a follow-up request for their preceding accreditation report. In sum, 87.5% of presenting institutions had received a follow-up request from their most recent and/or prior

accreditation report. These statistics and the topics presented suggested that the MSCHE outcomes were likely a factor in the changes that took place.

At the same time, it should be noted that all of the presenting institutions also had an internal desire for change. Indeed, without such a desire, their change processes could not have been sustained, much less resulted in the development of some really amazing approaches to assessment, adoption of the use of data, and creation of institutional improvement tools. Even as the presenting schools are remarkably diverse on variables including mission, degree types, selectivity, program emphasis, composition of student bodies, etc., their work has provided building blocks and insights that can provide potentially significant value to many other institutions. The sharing of those experiences, processes, and achievements is one of the most valuable aspects of ANNY membership and events.

Lehman College has recently moved from a situation in which it was asked to provide follow-up reports (MSCHE Standards 7 and 14) to a periodic review report that was accepted without any follow-up request. The MSCHE follow-up request coupled with institutional leadership helped bring about the changes that resulted in a successful periodic review report outcome. Lehman's challenge going forward entails deepening its recent gains and sustaining its quest for improvement. The presentations and materials provided at the ANNY conference furnish the proverbial nutrients for maintaining that effort.