Using Appreciative Inquiry to Build Collaborative Leadership Among Assessment and Accreditation Leaders in a Public University System

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Overview

- Historical perspective of the Councils'

- Process used to adjust the Councils' purposes

- Alignment of process with Appreciative Inquiry principles

Outcomes

- Using Appreciative Inquiry principles to

  - build collaborative leadership and enhance the work environment of Council leaders

  - create connections and increase communication and teamwork among Council members
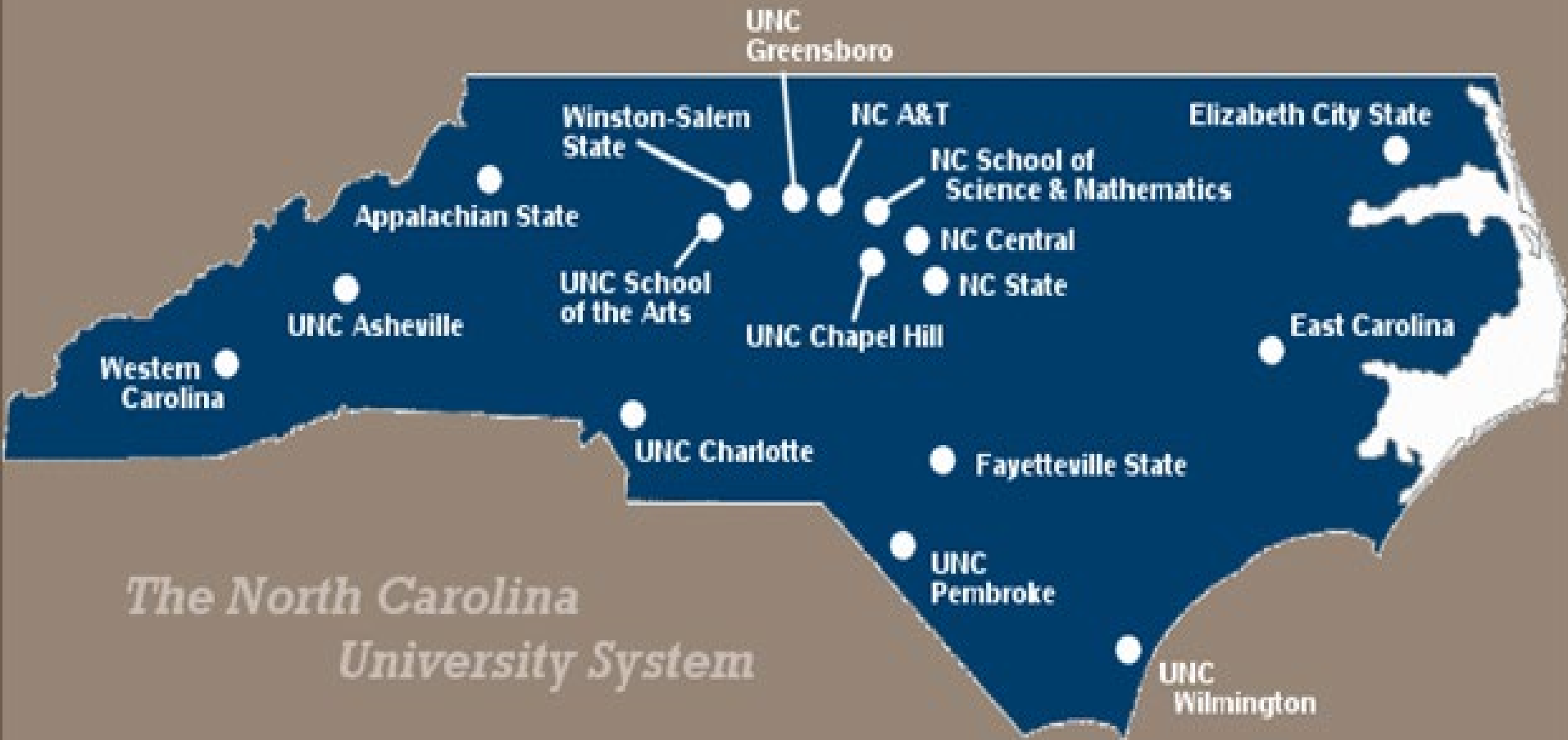
UNC Greensboro

Winston-Salem State

NC A&T

Elizabeth City State

NC School of Science & Mathematics

Appalachian State

NC Central

UNC School of the Arts

NC State

UNC Asheville

UNC Chapel Hill

East Carolina

Western Carolina

UNC Charlotte

Fayetteville State

UNC Pembroke

UNC Wilmington

The North Carolina University System

How the UNC Accreditation Council started

History

Leadership was from the UNC System Office until Summer 2017

A void: Leadership was left to the campuses

Christine assumed the leadership role and organized the

- Quarterly meetings
- State of North Carolina at the SACSCOC annual conference
- Development of common narratives for Governing Board standards

UNC Accreditation Council Charge

Share with members about policy and/or procedural changes to the

- USDE Federal Regulations
- SACSCOC Principles and Substantive Change Policy
- UNC System policies

Exchange ideas on how to

- demonstrate compliance with SACSCOC

- adjust institutional policies, practices and/or procedures

Mentor those new to their positions

How UNC Assessment Council started

History

New Council formed in 2016 and was based upon a UNC General Education Council recommendation

Small group from the UNC System institutions were invited to be on the Council leaders

Council leaders organized

- Quarterly meetings

- Annual face-to-face retreats

UNC Assessment Council Charge

Create a community of assessment leaders sharing best practices, providing support, and serving as peers (Share)

Serve as resources regarding assessment and educate others in the system about assessment (Educate)

Advocate for best practices in assessment (Advocate);

Serve in an advisory capacity to the Board of Governors and UNC System (Advise)

Build bridges among all stakeholders and connect all involved in assessment across the campuses (Communicate).

Councils' Accomplishments

UNC Accreditation Council

Organized professional development efforts with state Community Colleges and Independent Colleges and Universities

Shared resources and provided guidance about SACSCOC compliance

Provided feedback to the UNC System on new policies and the impact on institutional compliance

UNC Assessment Council

Developed a website with useful resources

Organized and provided

 - networking and professional development opportunities

 -model of practices from multiple institutions

UNC System Assessment and Accreditation Council
2020-21 Meetings & Activities

Aug 2020
- Opening Meeting
- Introduce Interviews
- Interests Inventory

Oct 2020
- Update on Interviews
- NILOA EIA
- Policy Revision
- Distance Ed

Feb 2021
- SACSCOC Annual Meeting Recap

Mar 2021
- General Education

May 2021
- Interview Summaries
- Breakouts by Interest Topics

Interviews: Council Leadership Team Interviews with Institutions

Survey: Individual Strengths & Weaknesses

Campus Interviews: Purpose and Process

- The leadership team of the joint Assessment and Accreditation met with assessment and accreditation leadership from each campus in fall 2020
- The purpose of these meetings was to:
  - Connect across the System in the absence of a face-to-face summer meeting and need for connection during Covid-19 response
  - Learn more about assessment and accreditation across the System including:
    - Points of pride
    - Goals
    - Feedback on Grand Challenges in assessment
    - Structure/organization
    - Best practices that can be shared with other campuses
  - Brainstorm ways to build community among assessment and accreditation professionals across the UNC System

Campus Interview Findings

Institutional Goals for Assessment/Accreditation: 1 and 3 Years

Organization of Assessment/Accreditation

1. **Reporting Lines and Administrative Structure**
   a. Most report to provost, some to Chancellor's Office
   b. Planning and IR coupled together with A/A in some institutions
   c. Reorgs underway at some institutions related to institutional effectiveness and assessment/accreditation.
2. **Committees/Councils**
   a. Varying degrees of formality and organization - size and staffing
   b. Differences across the UNC System on degree of coupling of academic and administrative assessment
   c. Desire to meaningfully engage students
3. **Staffing**
   a. Varying levels of resource - bigger institutions often had higher investment
   b. Mid-size and smaller institutions differed in staffing depending on resource availability, focus of executive leadership, and maturity of initiatives
   c. Leaders with lower resources fulfill broad duty areas professionally and act as boundary crossers across the institutions
   d. Temporary staff roles are often used close to a review visit or upon receiving feedback on improvement areas

Interview Ideas for Council Network Support and Programming

1. Efficient resource sharing system
2. Connect with others on best practices on organizing assessment/accreditation and institutional effectiveness units/committees
3. Discuss practices in transitioning coordinators, working with administrative units, and engaging faculty and students in processes
4. Discussions of technology platforms and software - System-level contracts
5. Strengthen council input to UNC System policies before they are enacted
6. Discuss ways to make assessment more engaging, fun, accessible
7. System-wide peer review for feedback on SACSCOC compliance and other support on specific accreditation standards
8. Mentoring network for new personnel in accreditation/assessment, the UNC System, or those just looking to expand skill sets

How will we grow? Council Focus and Planning for 2021-22

Technology and Assessment/Accreditation

- Current software used
- Software system needs
- System-level contracts

System-Wide Peer Review System for Accreditation

- Act as peer reviewers by mutually reviewing each others' documents
- Create community around shared knowledge of SACSCOC accreditation policies and procedures

Mentoring Network and Resource-Sharing

- Survey to identify those interested in making connections
- What do you need? What can you share?

Map of Council Activities Tied to Mission/Outcomes

- How the two groups operate
- revisit the mission & outcomes of the council
- update the map of council activities

The Work of the UNC Council from an Appreciative Inquiry Lens

A review of 2020-21

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Strengths-based, positive approach

Guide process and performance improvements

Build collaboration and teamwork

Facilitate collaborative leadership

Impact organizational culture

Find meaning through conversation and collaboration

Encourages divergent / creative thinking, collaboration, and synergy

Creates momentum towards positive change

AI – Core Principles & Steps

Core Principles of AI

Constructivism (Conversation)

Simultaneity (Divergent & Creative Thinking)

Poetic (Collaboration & Synergy)

Anticipation (Momentum)

Positivity (Attitude)

Steps of the AI Cycle

Discovery (Best of what is)

Dream (What might be)

Design (How can it be)

Destiny (What will be)

AI in Higher Education

AI in Higher Education:

Advising*

Student Leadership*

Residence Life*

Counseling

Course design

Pedagogy

Instructional design / Management

AI is Applicable to Higher Education

Different worldviews, perspectives, & realities among disciplines, functional roles, backgrounds, experiences

Differences in institutional and departmental culture

Silos (individual, disciplinary, academic departments, school/college, institution)

Problem solving / deficit paradigm is predominant

Change is difficult

Expectation for consensus

AI & Work of the Council

Goals of the Council for 2020-21:
> Enhance communication
> Strengthen collaboration
> Build community

Focusing on Two Aspects of the UNC Council Charge:
> Create community of assessment & accreditation leaders (Sharing)
> Build bridges among all stakeholders and connect all involved in assessment across institutions (Communication)

First few months of planning:
> Better understanding of the strengths in assessment and accreditation at other institutions
> Begin conversations with emphasis on positive, strengths-based approach

The Council & Collaborative Leadership

Council Leadership Team
1 UNC System Office Leader
2 Assessment Leaders
2 Accreditation Leaders
2 Council Past Leaders (Assessment)
1 Faculty Leader

The Assessment and Accreditation Council
Assessment & Accreditation Professionals at System Institutions
(50+ Members)

AI Principles & Work of the Council

Constructivism through Conversations
- *Team:* Diversity in professional experiences and roles at our institutions. Continue to discover the perspectives among team members.
- *Interviews:* Better understanding of the realities at other institutions

Simultaneity, Divergent & Creative Thinking
- *Team:* Divergent & creative thinkers who encourage creative ideas and possible solutions

Poetic, Collaboration & Synergy
- *Team: Projects based on strengths and similar interests*
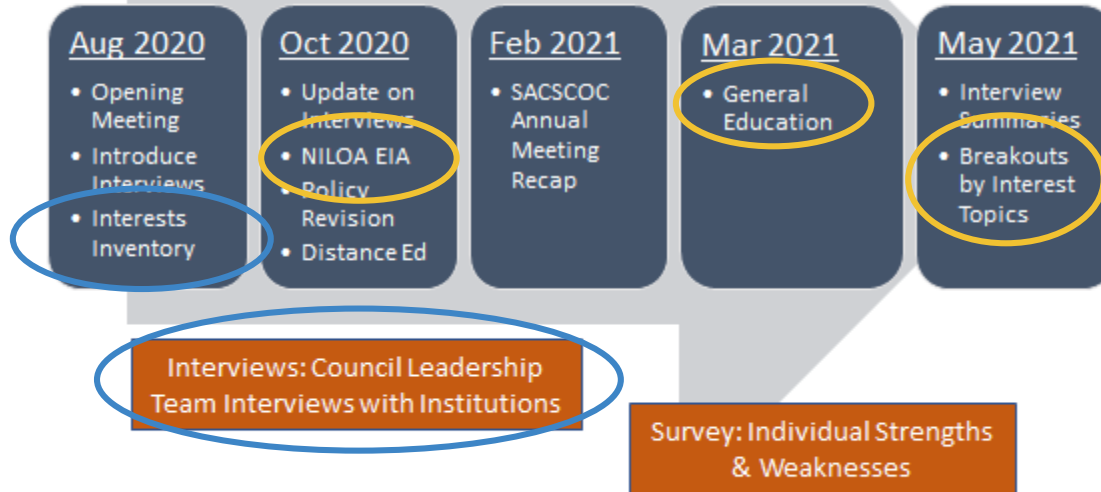
Anticipation & Momentum Through a Positive Lens
- Team: Continue to build momentum for the future

AI Steps & Work of the Council

- **Discovery (Explore from positive frame)**
  - Interviews with institutions:
    - Identify institutional and individual strengths & capabilities
    - Questions: What are your points of pride? What do you feel are your greatest successes? What are your goals?
- **Dream (Brainstorm possibilities)**
  - Leadership Team & Interviews with Institutions:
    - How can institutions highlight their successes to benefit other institutions in the UNC system?
    - Future leaders to contribute to / join the Leadership Team
- **Design (Plan projects)**
  - Leadership Team
    - Feedback from Interest inventories (Aug 2020 Council Meeting) guided/contributed to projects and programming
      - EIA Designation (Oct 2020 Council Meeting)
      - General Education (Mar 2021)
      - Further conversations, similarities for conversations among Council members in Breakout by Interest topics (May 2021 Council Meeting)
- **Destiny (Longer-term vision for future)**
  - Next steps for leadership team is planning for 2021-22 and longer term
  - Use AI steps and principles to build on collaborative leadership within the Leadership Team

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Conclusions

Appreciative Inquiry approach can be beneficial to assessment and accreditation professionals as we work across institutions and between different institutions

Break down and works around barriers & operational silos by building on similarities with a focus of positivity for the future

Promote cross disciplinary and inter/intra institutional teamwork

Improved engagement among Council members

Engage in meaningful conversation & openly share knowledge

Identify, build, integrate strengths & experiences of others

Help people work together to understand and perpetuate strengths

Implications & Possibilities

Appreciative Inquiry can benefit our profession and our institutions

Inter/Intra disciplinary and institutional collaboration

Gain group cohesion and common purpose

Elicit information from stakeholders

Organizational development and strategic change

Strategic planning

Accreditation

Assessment & Culture of Assessment

Contact us

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