

ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES COMMITTEE REPORT

February 20, 2007

The Assessment of Educational Outcomes Committee has met once a month since the beginning of the school year. Whereas the 2005-06 Committee carried out a general needs assessment, this year's Committee has focused its efforts on process and organizational structure issues. As stated in the bylaws, "The Committee shall have the general responsibility of making recommendations concerning policies in the area of assessment of educational outcomes and related matters. The Committee shall also regularly review and advise on policies and procedures in this area and recommend changes when appropriate." To this end the Committee first would like to reiterate last year's recommendations :

1. The committee recommends the reallocation of resources to support a designated Director of Assessment within Academic Affairs. The Director will assume primary responsibility for coordinating the assessment process, chair the Assessment of Educational Outcomes Committee, and provide consultation as needed for other departments and programs.
2. The committee recommends the appointment of Assessment Coordinators at the college, department and/or program level.
3. A new committee, the "Student Learning Committee," will be formed with the Director of Assessment as permanent Chair and the various assessment coordinators at the college, department and/or program level would constitute its regular members.
4. The current composition and charge of the Assessment of Educational Outcomes Committee lacks the resources and institutional influence to assume an integral role in campus level assessment. Furthermore, the new Student Learning Committee would be better equipped to offer policy recommendations; thus, the continued viability of the Assessment of Educational Outcomes Committee should be reassessed.
5. Despite the limited and antiquated approach to general education assessment that currently is in place, the large number of nationally accredited programs across campus and ongoing five-year program review process will bode well for our overall accreditation efforts. Nonetheless, a centralized and coordinated system is needed to ensure that assessment results are used to make meaningful revisions to individual courses and programs (especially for general education courses and non-accredited programs).
6. Two levels of assessment should be implemented: one at the department or program level, and the other at the university level where annual reports can be compiled and continually cross-referenced with national accreditation standards.
7. The need to develop and promote an institutional culture of assessment cannot be understated. A comprehensive professional development program of guest speakers, panel discussions, and open forums is needed at all levels to increase faculty awareness and competence in the area of assessment. The university assessment plan should focus on ways to document and improve student learning on an ongoing and continual basis.

Despite the lack of action and progress associated with these recommendations, the Committee has continued to develop a model assessment plan based on best practices. Last fall Provost Cope sent three faculty (Don Gouwens, Mike Bahr, and Sel Dibooglu) to the 2006 Assessment Institute in Indianapolis. This was a truly outstanding conference that is highly recommended for everybody who has program or institutional assessment responsibilities. Perhaps the most important outcome of this conference was validation of the Committee's findings and recommendations from last year.

In particular concerns regarding the need for various types of data were confirmed, as standardized tests clearly are insufficient for the purpose of Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation.

While the university's nationally accredited programs represent a definite strength, the exclusive reliance on standardized testing for general education assessment remains a liability. In addition to the Academic Profile, the UM-System is paying for our participation in a pilot study of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). While the CLA provides standardized assessment of critical thinking and analytical writing skills, it does not address our immediate need for curriculum-based assessment. Assessment often is erroneously perceived as an additional and time consuming activity that is somehow separate from teaching; this belief contributes to the appeal of standardized tests and must be challenged. A common theme throughout the 2006 Assessment Institute was that quality assessment is a fundamental cornerstone of good teaching that has significant implications for student learning, recruitment, retention, graduation rates, and ultimately faculty productivity.

When the university undergoes its HLC accreditation visit in the spring of 2009, we can be expected to have a clearly articulated, comprehensive, and ongoing university assessment plan in place as a condition of accreditation. The world of higher education has changed dramatically since our last accreditation visit in 1998, but unfortunately our approach to general education assessment has not kept up with emerging trends. Assessment clearly has assumed a substantially more prominent role in the accreditation process than previously was the case.

According to presenters at the 2006 Assessment Institute, the process of developing and implementing a new assessment plan is a slow and laborious process. Reports suggested that it takes roughly two years to develop general education goals and outcomes, and from there it can take upwards of five years to develop and implement a reliable campus wide system of data collection and scoring. Even if we continue to use the six 2002-03 General Education program goals of Communicating Skills, Managing Information Skills, Valuing Skills, Social and Behavioral Sciences Knowledge, Humanities and Fine Arts, and Mathematics and Life/Natural Sciences, these are not stated as measurable outcomes. As such, the university has its work cut out before an organized and fully functional assessment plan can even be put in place. Consequently, to address the inadequacies in the current assessment plan, the Assessment of Educational Outcomes Committee offers the following recommendations :

1. The 2002-03 General Education program goals need to be reviewed and operationally defined as unitary and measurable outcomes.
2. Each general education course needs to be reviewed to ensure alignment of course objectives and institutional goals.
3. Strategic course embedded assessments that clearly address the general education goals (e.g., papers, course projects, presentations, etc.) need to be developed and implemented.
4. Random samples of assessments from identified courses need to be collected each semester.
5. A group of faculty scores all assessments. (Note: the nature and extent of this role warrants multi-year commitments and course load reassignments or overload pay.)
6. The results of each assessment should be compiled in annual reports that document how the findings were used to improve instruction.
7. This process needs to begin this semester with the assessment of writing skills.

Don Gouwens, Chairperson
February 20, 2007