

ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES COMMITTEE REPORT

November 8, 2005

The Assessment of Educational Outcomes Committee met on October 12 and 27. According to the Senate by-laws, "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." Thus, the committee views its primary goal as ensuring broad faculty input regarding the assessment of student learning.

The topic of assessment of educational outcomes has received increasing attention in recent years. The university's accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) expires in spring 2009. The HLC Handbook of Accreditation places special emphasis on assessment: "An organization's commitment to and capacity for effective assessment of student learning will figure more prominently than ever in the accreditation relationship established between the Commission and that organization." Consequently, it is critical that we have a coordinated and functional assessment plan in place well in advance of this date.

To this end, the committee reviewed the HLC standards and initiated a review of existing assessment procedures within the university and among our comparators. As much as possible, we would like to merge any existing unit assessment processes into a larger university assessment plan. Preliminary results suggest that undergraduate and graduate degree programs with their own accrediting organizations are likely to meet or exceed HLC standards. However, a coordinated program of assessment that supports the making meaningful programmatic decisions generally is lacking in the areas of general education, graduate support courses, and non-accredited degrees and programs.

The committee believes that a need exists to develop a broad based university-supported process/program of assessment that incorporates multiple types and sources of data. While concerns were expressed about how to ensure that the university based approach would be comprehensive and sufficiently flexible to satisfy the diverse needs of each program (e.g., the arts will have very different outcomes than chemistry), ideally this information would be maintained in a centralized database to meet various program development and evaluation related needs for formal and informal program audits, reviews, and accreditation.

Of critical importance is the need for ongoing review and utilization of this information for quality control purposes. The committee believes that the university needs to promote formative evaluation as a university-wide value that is embraced and embedded throughout the culture and is exploring ways to facilitate a new gestalt (e.g., campus-wide panel discussions and/or unit-level meetings). In this way, we would be well on our way to meeting or exceeding any accreditation standards without creating unnecessary extra work for individual programs when they are due for accreditation.

The committee will be meeting every three weeks throughout the semester and welcomes input from all interested faculty. We will continue to explore the committee's role in the assessment plan and will present formal recommendations regarding this process at an upcoming Senate meeting.

Don Gouwens, Chairperson
November 8, 2005