

An Assessment Framework

NOTE: This document, first approved by the College's Board of Trustees, July 2005, has been revised to reflect the adoption of the Learning Outcomes Assessment by the Faculty Senate in January 2006, and signed by the President in May 2006. The principal changes are: (1) a two-year cycle of assessment activities rather than a one-year cycle, and (2) a more pronounced emphasis on the Core Competencies in the assessment of student learning. Finally, some of the language has been clarified and simplified based upon feedback.

This document provides a framework for assessment. It is comprehensive in that it addresses assessment issues at all levels, but it is not complete. It does not, for instance, focus upon the argument for assessment or its relative value, nor does it address all questions about process. Of necessity, an assessment strategy must be fluid and adaptable to changing circumstances. Further, some implementation issues will have to be worked out with key stakeholders.

It does, however, provide a formal assessment strategy that:

- meets accreditation standards.
- details what must be done without being overly prescriptive regarding specific goals or approaches to accomplishing these goals.
- documents assessment activities in writing, including their results and use.
- and focuses clearly upon the mission of the college to provide quality, affordable education.

There are two parts to the proposed strategy.

- an on-going two-year cycle of continuous assessment activities that includes all college units.
- and a periodic, formal departmental and academic program review process.

Although this proposal builds upon several assessment efforts that have evolved over several years, including most recently the work of the Institutional Assessment Committee, and the Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Accessing Student Learning, it is not a compilation of these plans. It does seek to be informed by this work, to integrate assessment activities with other activities at the college, and to institutionalize an assessment practice.

Some of the assessment activities outlined here may be put in place immediately, some in the short term future, and some may require more time.

Lastly, the Framework identifies and relies upon three key documents that provide the foundation for assessment activities. These are: (1) Mission and Goals, (2) Strategic Priorities, and (3) Core Competencies.

I. Assessment activities

At the heart of this assessment framework is an ongoing practice of assessment activities. These activities include all units at the college, both administrative and academic, as outlined by the Institutional Assessment Committee, as well as institution-wide measures of institutional effectiveness. In the case of the academic areas, assessment focuses principally upon student learning and takes place at the course, department/program, and institutional levels.

Reference will be made to completing assessment worksheets. These worksheets will be explained later on.

A. Institutional

There will be multiple measures and indicators of institutional effectiveness. Institutional goals must, by definition, be explicitly related to the College's mission and goals.

1. An embedded strategy

In the strategy proposed here, institutional assessment is **embedded** in the assessment plans of all college units in that every unit is required to include five goals, such that:

- at least one goal explicitly relates to the College's Mission and Goals,
- at least one goal relates to the College's Strategic Plan,
- and, in the case of academic units, at least two goals relate to at least one Core Competency.

Of course, in principle, the same goal can serve multiple purposes. The key to assessment is not how many distinct and separate goals there are but whether these goals are thoughtfully selected and whether the results of assessment are used to improve effectiveness.

2. Other indicators

In addition, six additional indicators of institutional effectiveness will be used, as outlined below.

a. Graduate student follow-up survey

For many years, the Office of Research and Planning has conducted the Graduate Student Follow-Up Survey and provided its results to college units.

The Graduate Student Follow-Up Survey will continue to be used. However, starting in the next assessment cycle, the section on student learning will be revised to focus more explicitly upon the Core Competencies as defined and established by the Faculty Senate.

The Office of Research and Planning will report the results of this section of the Graduate Student Follow-Up Survey to the college community including the Faculty Senate.

b. Blueprint for excellence indicators

As part of the state's statewide plan for higher education, Blueprint for Excellence, the College is committed to using several indicators of institutional effectiveness as stated below.

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning is responsible for tracking these indicators and reporting on them to the College community.

The indicators are:

- Number of Students Served
- Graduation Rate for Minority Students
- Overall Graduation Rate
- Graduation Rate for Low-Income Students
- Overall Transfer Rate

c. Student Goals

Students will be asked to identify their chief objective(s) when first enrolling at the College as part of the application process. Upon exiting from the College,

through appropriate use of sampling, students will be asked to indicate the extent to which they believe they achieved their objective.

Implementing this goal will require that the college's new online admissions process be put into place.

d. Key performance indicators

It is envisioned that over time the College will develop a set of key performance indicators of institutional effectiveness. These will likely encompass the indicators and measures outlined in this section and integrate with the College's strategic planning process and the goals that are included in the College's mission statement.

e. Transfer data

Because the essential purpose of Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees is to prepare students to transfer to a four year institution, the Office of Research and Planning will collect and analyze appropriate data regarding transfer rates and success rates at the four year institution for students having transferred. Much of this data is available through the SURE record system.

These results will be shared with the college community, including academic divisions and departments as well as the Faculty Senate for appropriate consideration and use.

f. Miscellaneous and ad hoc approaches, e.g., Noel Levitz

In addition, other assessment devices and strategies may be used as appropriate, such as the Noel Levitz survey of student satisfaction.

3. Reporting

Results from these institutional assessment activities will be reported regularly to the college community with the expectation that college units will respond appropriately. Ensuring that this is done is principally the responsibility of senior management. Senior administration through the Office of Institutional Research and the Center for Institutional Effectiveness will prepare an annual report that presents, summarizes, analyses institutional assessment data, along with appropriate recommendations for using these results to improve institutional effectiveness. These recommendations may include, but are not limited to, asking college units to include specific goals in the next cycle of assessment.

B. College units

All college units, as defined in the report by the Institutional Assessment Committee, are required to participate in yearly assessment activities as detailed below. Because academic units and administrative units differ substantially in responsibilities and functions, each will be treated separately.

1. Administrative and Educational Support Units

Administrative and Educational Support units will choose a short list of goals and complete assessment worksheets. The number of goals will vary based upon the size of the unit and the complexity of its mission.

For purposes of the College's formal assessment plan, Administrative and Educational Support units must select five goals, one of which must be related to the College's Mission and Goals, and one of which must be related to the College's Strategic Priorities. Student Service Administrative and Educational Support units are encouraged to consider a goal relating their student development philosophy to the Core Competencies as well.

2. Academic units

Assessment in instruction focuses upon academic departments and programs, interdepartmental programs, and courses. Each of these will be treated in turn.

a. Academic Departments

Each assessment cycle, academic departments will choose a short list of goals and complete assessment worksheets for each goal. These worksheets would be completed by June 30th of each year, and kept on file in the department office in an orderly manner. They will serve as the foundation for the departmental and program reviews, meeting assessment requirements of external program accrediting groups, as well as those by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

The number of goals chosen by a department depends principally upon whether it offers specific AAS degree programs. Departments that do not offer specific AAS degree programs will identify at least five assessment goals, such that:

- At least two explicitly relates to one or more of the Core competencies,
- At least one explicitly relates to the College's Mission and Goals,
- And at least one relates the College's Strategic Priorities.

The fifth goal may be explicitly related to one of the foundational documents, but need not be.

In choosing goals, departments will want to consider program options and service areas, as appropriate.

Departments that offer specific AAS degree programs will complete assessment worksheets for EACH AAS program, that is, departments will identify five goals, as defined above, for each AAS program. Certificate degree programs and Certificates of Achievement may be included with their related AAS degree program. Stand-alone Certificates or Certificates of Achievement will be treated as separate academic programs.¹ It is envisioned that assessment goals would be chosen, partly, in light of accreditation criteria where they exist. Doing so should greatly facilitate preparation of program and accreditation reviews.

It is likely that over time all departments will focus upon different aspects of its mission. Not all activities, service areas, options, etc. need be or should be address in any assessment period.

b. Interdepartmental programs

The Office of the AVP will maintain and publish a list of interdepartmental programs that are required to participate in a formal assessment and review. These are likely to include, but need not be limited to, General Education, Honors, Developmental Studies, and the American Language Program. Interdepartmental programs so identified will choose a short list of appropriate goals, including at least one that is explicitly related to the College's Mission and Goals and complete annual assessment worksheets for each goal.

Interdepartmental programs that already have established goals (General Education may be an appropriate example) are not asked to identify new goals. For purposes of annual assessment, these programs should select from their unit's goals those goals to be focused upon during each assessment cycle.

¹ In some cases, there is considerable overlap among AAS degree programs. Further, departments may be in the process of phasing out specific programs. To eliminate unnecessary work, CIE will publish for each assessment cycle a list of AAS programs and Certificates that must be assessed.

c. An implementation sketch

CIE will be responsible for providing direction, training, and coordination to help academic departments succeed in their assessment activities. During the spring 2006, CIE worked with the Faculty Senate to develop a four-semester sequence of continuous assessment activities focusing upon the Core Competencies. (See Appendix A.) This sketch will serve as the model for all assessment related goals.

C. Course Assessment

Student learning will be assessed at the course level as well as at the departmental/program and institutional levels. The principal responsibility for assessing student learning at the course level rests, appropriately enough, with individual faculty members and their departments. Academic departments should develop appropriate strategies for assisting faculty with assessment of student learning at the course level.

Key points here are:

- Syllabi should have a common format that explicitly includes student learning objectives in conformity with Senate, Curriculum Committee, and other college policies. Syllabi should provide clear indication of how student learning is assessed, and academic departments should develop appropriate strategies for reviewing and using collective assessments.
- Annual audits of syllabi should take place to ensure that they are maintained in proper form and that files are complete. The academic dean is responsible for ensuring that the annual audit is completed each year by June 30th.
- Syllabi should be kept in electronic form and sensibly filed. It is likely that appropriate software could be used to facilitate this process.

II. *Departmental review*

The departmental review process includes all college units. There are two aspects:

- a brief annual report,
- and a comprehensive, rigorous departmental review once every five years.

A. Annual reports

Each college unit would complete a yearly annual report which includes these elements:

- A report on the status of the year's goals
- A list of key accomplishments for use in preparing the College's annual report.
- Next year's goals.

B. Five year review

Once every five years, each college unit would undergo a more comprehensive and rigorous review process.

a. Elements

In addition to the elements in the annual report process, the five year review would include:

- An analysis of key issues.
- Budget and resource evaluation

- Assessment data

A summary and analysis of the assessment data collected since the last review, along with a discussion of how assessment data were used to improve unit functioning.

- Recommendations

b. One year follow up report

It is envisioned that departments would file with their supervisor a brief follow up progress report one year later on the status of any recommendations that emerged from the review. Each Vice-President is responsible for reviewing these follow-up reports to ensure that appropriate action has been taken.

III. Academic program reviews

Academic program reviews, using the current program review process, would be required for:

- each AAS degree program along with associated Certificates
- stand-alone Certificates.
- interdepartmental programs identified by the AVP as required to participate in the college's formal assessment process.

The current program review process can likely be simplified by relying more heavily upon the annual assessment worksheets outlined in this document.² Although individual program reviews are no longer required for individual AA and AS options, departments may elect to do so.

IV. A note about goals

A key to assessment activities is to select a short list of goals that matter to the unit. Well-framed goals should attempt to answer research questions about the unit's functioning that if answered could make a difference in effectiveness. If the answer to the question doesn't matter, then the goal needs to be reformulated or eliminated.

Further, there is no need to select a long list of annual assessment goals. Choose a few goals that matter. Assessment is a continuing activity, so there is no need to assess everything in a single year. Indeed, it is counterproductive to do so and would leave little time for the unit's work.

A sensible guideline is to rotate goals annually in light of the five year departmental or program review process. Obviously, department leaders should select goals for programs subject to external accreditation with these criteria in mind.

Finally, college units may decide to adopt goals beyond those explicitly called for in this assessment plan. A department, for instance, may have very specific operational goals that it wishes to pursue but does not wish, for whatever reason, to formally report on for purposes of assessment.

V. Assessment Worksheet

See document: [Assessment Worksheet.doc](#)

² Currently, the Academic Vice President is working with a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate to revised and to state formally guidelines for the conduct of program reviews. This committee is expected to complete its work late in the 2006 – 2007 academic year.

For purposes of documentation, it is important that college units use a common format for documenting assessment activities.

Attached is the form to be used. The use of the form is not optional.