

Anticipating and Responding to SACS Requirements: Student Learning Assessment

presented by

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SACS Mandates Related to Student Learning

□ Core Requirement 5

The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide planning and evaluation processes that incorporate systematic review of programs and services that

- (a) results in continuing improvement and
- (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.

□ Comprehensive Standard 16

The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves the outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.



Definitions

□ Assessment

"The systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development."¹

□ Competencies

Statements of the knowledge, skills and attitudes graduates are expected to possess upon completion of a specific degree program.

Example:

Graduates will acquire leadership and interpersonal skills.

¹ Palomba, C.A., & Banta, T.W., *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 5.



Definitions

□ Student Learning Outcomes

Statements of specific knowledge, attitudes or skills students will be able to demonstrate upon completion of a course or program.

Example:

Students in the capstone course will demonstrate leadership and interpersonal skills during the completion of team-based course assignments.

- Derived from the statements of student competencies
- Student-focused rather than instructor-focused
- Focus on learning resulting from an activity rather than on the activity itself

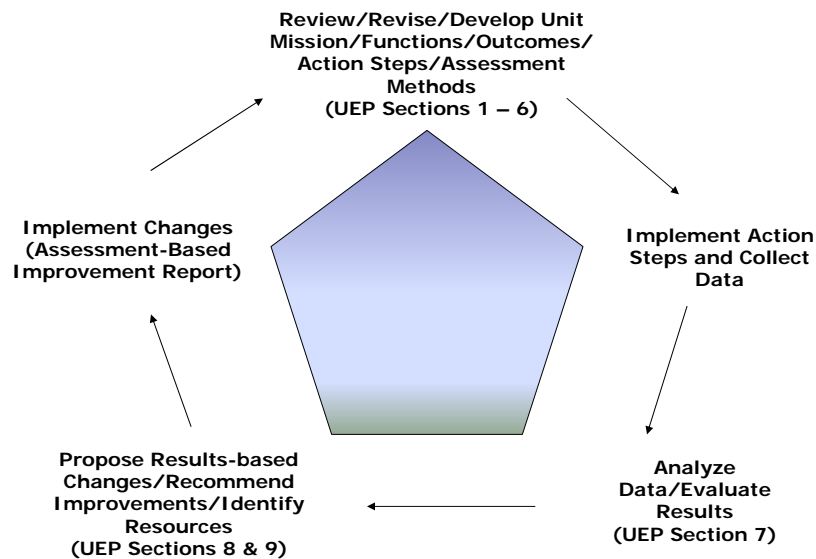
Assessment at UT Arlington: History

- Prior to 1997
 - Pockets of planning and evaluation -- some exemplary, but most not focused on student learning outcomes
- Preparation for SACS visit and subsequent recommendations led to development and implementation of new unit effectiveness process
 - Comprehensive, ongoing
 - Involves every academic and administrative/support unit
 - Links unit planning and assessment to university mission and goals



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UT Arlington's Unit Planning Process



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Draft of 2005-07 Planning Calendar

Date	Action	From	To
1-Sep-06 to 15-Aug-07	Implement action steps/Assess outcomes and collect data	All Unit Heads	N/A
15-Aug-07 to 30-Sep-07	Analyze and review assessment data/Develop recommendations for improvement to programs and services	All Unit Heads	N/A
1-Oct-07	Completed Unit Effectiveness Plans, Sections 7-8 (1st draft)	Chairs and Directors	Deans and VPs
1-Oct-07 to 22-Oct-07	Feedback on Completed UEPs	Deans and VPs	Chairs and Directors
22-Oct-07	Completed Unit Effectiveness Plans, Sections 7-8 (2nd draft)	All Unit Heads	Institutional Research and Planning
22-Oct-07 to 15-Dec-07	Feedback on Completed UEPs	Institutional Research and Planning	All Unit Heads
15-Nov-07	Report of Assessment-Based Improvements Implemented Spring 2006, Summer 2006 or Fall 2006	All Unit Heads	Institutional Research and Planning
15-Feb-08	Completed UEPs (Final draft)	All Unit Heads	Institutional Research and Planning



[Unit Effectiveness Plan](#)
[Department\(Unit\):](#)
[College \(Division\):](#)

Section 1: Unit Mission or Purpose:						
Section 2: Articulation of how unit mission/purpose relates to University mission:						
Section 3: Intended Outcome	Section 4: Related Institutional Goal/Objective/ Strategy	Section 5: Action Steps	Section 6: Method of Assessment (Who, What, When)	Section 7: Results of Assessment	Section 8: Proposed Changes and Recommendations for Improvement	Section 9: Resources Needed for Proposed Changes



Assessment-Based Improvement Report

Report on Assessment-Based Improvements Implemented in AY03-04 or Fall 04

Unit: _____

Assessment Result Requiring Improvement (from UEP)	Action(s) Implemented	Implementation Date (Semester, Year)



Assessment at UT Arlington: An Evolving Process

- Assessment Cycle
 - One-year cycle in 1997-98 and 1998-99
 - Began lengthening cycle in 1999-2000
 - 2002-2004 first two-year cycle
- Outcomes
 - During early cycles, academic departments were asked to assess one undergrad SLO and one grad SLO, plus oral competency, computer proficiency, research, service and advising.
 - During 2002-2004, focus of SLO's shifted to individual degree programs -- units instructed to ensure that all competencies would be assessed over two cycles.



Assessment at UT Arlington: An Evolving Process

- Other changes
 - Development of on-line entry system
 - Addition of Assessment Based Improvement Report (to close the loop)
 - Occasional availability of funds to defray cost of assessment
 - Appointment of Institutional Effectiveness Advisory Committee to review our process and recommend improvements



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Institutionalizing the Process

- Internal Audit asks to see UEP when reviewing a unit
- Academic Program Review includes a section for summarizing the results of the unit's assessments of student learning
- New requirement that units develop student competencies and UEP as part of the proposal process for new academic programs



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Concerns About Assessment

□ Academic Freedom

- Some faculty resist even the first step in assessment which requires that faculty work together to agree on competencies and outcomes that students completing a program should achieve. They argue that “having someone, even one’s own colleagues, tell an instructor what a student should learn in his or her classes is an abridgment of academic freedom.”¹
- It is true that the AAUP “Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure” does contain the following statement:
“Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subjects.”²

¹ Banta, T.W. , *Assessment Update*, Sept-Oct 1997, Vol. 9, No. 5
² See <<http://www.igc.apc.org/aaup.1940stat.htm>>



Concerns About Assessment

□ Academic Freedom

- “Assessment rightly conducted doesn’t ask faculty to repress their knowledge or judgments. Rather, it asks faculty to work together as colleagues to assess student work fairly by criteria respected in the field and to share their knowledge of student strengths and weaknesses, in order to improve curriculum, pedagogy, and other factors that affect learning.”¹
- “No one has ever had the right to teach a course just as she pleases.... We hand out a syllabus or put it on the Web. We establish goals for the course and share them with colleagues and students. We share problems in student learning and plans for a course whenever we submit a course to the curriculum committee for approval, ask for new resources, come up for tenure, or engage in a departmental discussion about improving our teaching.”¹

¹ Walvoord, B. E., *Assessment Clear and Simple* (Jossey Bass, 2004), p. 8.

Concerns About Assessment

- “Meaningfulness”
 - Process often seems rigid and formulaic
 - Assessment methodology not rigorous, so data not reliable
 - “Don’t let the perfect keep you from doing the possible.”
 - “Ineffability debate” ¹
 - To what extent can educational outcomes be specified and meaningfully measured?
 - Significant outcomes seem to be more difficult to measure
 - Trivial outcomes seem to be easier to measure

¹ Ewell, Peter T., “An emerging scholarship: A brief history of assessment,” in *Building a Scholarship of Assessment*, Banta and Associates (eds.). (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 17.

Concerns About Assessment

- Use of the Information
 - Are there negative consequences for not meeting targets?
 - Will this information be used to evaluate faculty?
 - Who reads these things?

Concerns About Assessment

- Student learning is affected by factors beyond our control
 - True – but student learning is also impacted by decisions that are within our control
 - Focus improvement efforts on the factors that are within your control
 - For some publics, may be helpful to present information on the factors beyond your control as well

Concerns About Assessment

- Why can't we just use grades?
 - Grading standards may be vague or inconsistent
 - Grades alone may give insufficient information on student strengths and weaknesses
 - Our publics don't trust grades as an indicator

Concerns About Assessment

- Redundancy/lack of coordination with other planning/evaluation processes
 - Professional accreditation
 - Strategic planning
 - Program review
 - Budgeting