

Recommendations to the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Concerning Implementation of an Ongoing Assessment Reporting Process

Assessment Policy Advisory Committee

February 2006

In response to the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost's charge to recommend an ongoing and meaningful process for student learning outcomes assessment, the Assessment Policy Advisory Committee (APAC) offers the following guiding principles, operational definitions, and implementation procedures.

General Principles Underlying the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at Carolina

- **The Committee affirms the importance of a regular, ongoing, campus-wide process for:**
 - Assessing the extent to which students achieve intended learning outcomes, and
 - Using the results to improve programs for enhancing student learning.
- Assessment is most likely to achieve its purpose of improving student learning if it is embedded in an **institutional culture that values reflection and supports continuous improvement efforts** across all levels of the organization. Learning outcomes assessment processes should be clearly related to other University evaluation and improvement initiatives, such as the Academic Plan and Measures of Excellence. In addition, outcomes assessment processes should be integrated with other accreditation and reporting procedures required of individual units.
- The support of senior administration in providing **adequate resources** to permit academic units to conduct meaningful outcomes assessment is imperative.

Operational Definitions

- The term **“Assessment”** in this context refers to program-level activities in which faculty conduct formal reviews of aggregated data measuring student knowledge and skill attainment and identify programmatic changes to align actual learning outcomes with expected outcomes. These data might be derived from direct measures of learning involving evaluations of samples of student work and performances or indirect methods such as senior or alumni surveys. Assessment differs from the grading process for individual courses in scope and purpose. As a form of program evaluation, assessment focuses on measuring outcomes of students' experiences across the program, while grading is limited to individual courses. The purpose of assessment is to provide faculty with evidence to be considered in improving the quality of the program, and is not concerned with providing feedback to students.

- A “**program**” is a sequence of credit-bearing courses and experiences designed to provide students with specific knowledge and skills. The degree major is the expected unit of analysis for outcomes assessment in academic units. However, deans should use their discretion in identifying other meaningful units of analysis in which assessment might be used to improve learning, such as concentrations within majors or non-degree certificate programs.
- Academic units typically have goals and means of measuring the effectiveness of other mission-related functions such as faculty research, public service, patient care, continuing education, or contributions to the profession and/or discipline. Those outcomes are often closely related to student learning outcomes within an academic unit. However, the Assessment Policy Advisory Committee’s recommendations focus on processes for the assessment of **student learning outcomes only**. The effectiveness of mechanisms that already exist for assessing other program outcomes, such as the Graduate School’s Program Review process and external accreditation activities undertaken by our professional schools, should be the subject of another study by a different committee.

Recommended Assessment and Reporting Cycle

- **All programs should create and follow a written assessment plan that includes a mission statement, intended learning outcomes, and a description of the methods that will be used to gather data on each outcome.** These assessment plans need not be uniform. Variations in assessment methods across programs should be supported to encourage faculty to use the most effective means of gathering and using data on their programs. Some programs have outcomes that can be measured and reviewed each year. Other programs might find it more valuable to conduct assessments that focus on one or two of their outcomes each year, thereby spreading out the assessment of all their outcomes over a longer period of time. The key principle is that programs should have an assessment plan that ensures a regular flow of meaningful data that can be used on a continuous basis for evaluating student learning in relation to outcomes.
- **All academic programs should report the following information on assessment activities on a regular basis to the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost:**
 - Findings from assessments conducted.
 - A description of how the results are being reviewed and used to enhance the program.
 - Recent improvements made as a result of assessments conducted in current or previous years.

In establishing reporting expectations, it should be recognized that assessment results do not necessarily require immediate change. Sometimes the findings indicate that programs are exceeding their goals, suggesting that current practices within the program should be maintained. A time lag between the submission of findings and completion of improvements is to be expected. Therefore, reports will likely contain a combination of recent findings and plans for change as well as follow-up information on changes made based on previous years’ assessment results.

- **Assessment report formats should be as flexible as possible, as long as each report contains the assessment findings, use of results, and improvements made based on**

results as described above. Optional report templates created by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment will be placed on that office's website along with other reference materials. Many programs already prepare annual assessment reports for external accrediting agencies that could possibly be used for this purpose with little or no modification.

- **The Committee recommends the following annual reporting cycle for academic programs:**
 - **Fall semester:** Programs submit assessment plans or updates to existing plans to the dean's office for review and submission to the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost by the end of the term.
 - **Academic Year and following summer:** Faculty conduct assessments planned for that year, review results, and consider implications for improvement.
 - **October 1 (or other early fall date to be determined by the dean):** Program chairs submit to their dean's office reports on assessment activities conducted during the previous academic year.
 - **January/February:** Deans compile assessment reports and submit with other material required for the Budget Planning Process. The deans may use assessment results to document their budget requests as appropriate.