



Actions Plans for Assessment

A new spring semester brings...the next round of assessing student learning outcomes. As a University we've made steady progress with stating student learning outcomes with greater precision, integrating direct assessments of learning into our plans, raising the target levels for acceptable performance, reported and analyzed results and developing action plans to improve the quality of student learning and of our assessment process. We can celebrate (briefly) our progress in reporting all this for the past several years.

Just as your individual programs have examined the results and reported on the actions plans you've developed to improve future student outcomes, we should do the same at and institutional level.

Based on our analysis of the student learning outcome reports submitted last summer, the following is a set of action plans for Georgia State University's assessment process. The five action plan items which follow are connected to principles for effective program evaluation and/or the Accreditation Guidelines of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools—our accrediting agency. These plans, along with the individual feedback that your program received should help guide you work in preparing your 2007-2008 learning assessment reports on WEAVEonline.

The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions requires that institutions document their commitment to student learning by:

- (1) setting clear learning goals, which speak to both content and level of attainment;
- (2) collecting evidence of goal attainment using appropriate assessment tools;
- (3) applying collective judgment as to the meaning and utility of the evidence; and
- (4) using this evidence to effect improvements in its programs (Regional Accreditation and Student Learning , 2004, p. 8).

The following four Action Plans are based on the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions requirements.

1. Increasing the number of learning outcomes to cover the content and skills (from requirement 1). How many student learning outcomes should be in an assessment report? That's hard to say—but certainly

enough to cover the major content knowledge and skills to be mastered by program graduates. For example, undergraduate programs would include the discipline-specific content and skills, as well as most, if not all of the University's seven general education learning outcomes as measured within the discipline. For graduate programs, again the content and skills, including research skills and, if appropriate, teaching skills.

2. Increase the use of appropriate assessment tools (from requirement 2). Appropriate assessment tools are direct measures of students' performance which are aligned with specific learning outcomes—typically projects, papers, examinations, presentations, and field work. **Grades in courses are almost never appropriate assessment tools.** This is because course grades include many components not directly related to the learning outcome, and, are therefore not sufficiently specific or aligned to be useful in identifying knowledge/skill mastery or guiding improvement. Appropriateness also means the most valid measurement of the knowledge or skill. For example, a multiple-choice examination may not be the most appropriate format for assessing critical thinking (life is not multiple-choice). Likewise, if research skill is an outcome for a graduate student, presenting and defending a research design to a thesis or dissertation committee is a more appropriate assessment or the skill passing a test in a research course.

3. Increase participation in assessment (from requirement 3). The principle of "collective judgment" means that the program faculty, not just the individual in charge of assessment, need to participate in reviewing and making judgments about what actions to take as a result of the assessment evidence. Likewise, the performance a broad number of students, especially graduates, needs to be assessed. For most programs, that means data on all graduates. For programs assessing the general education learning outcomes in the core, student performance in most courses would be assessed.

4. Designing and implementing Acton Plans to improve our programs (requirement 4). **This is the big one!!**

Notice that requirement 4 doesn't say that programs must/should document that students have met the goals developed by the program. Instead, it specifies

that we must document that we are using our assessment data to improve. To meet this requirement, we must do the following:

- a). **All programs must have action plans** in their annual assessment reports. We're not perfect yet and need to document for ourselves and communicate to others, that we're working to improve. Likewise, our action plans need to move us forward. An action plan that states we will monitor and maintain is out of compliance with the accreditation requirement to "effect improvements".
- b). Action plans need to be implemented with a follow-up report on what happened. In many cases it will take several years to see meaning results. In some cases action plans will not result in what we had planned.

We anticipate that the deadline for learning assessment reports for the 2007-2008 cycle will be July 1 2008.

Departmental Instructional Effectiveness Awards

Each year the University recognizes two departments for the quality of their annual reports on assessing student learning—one department that has professional accreditation and a second department without an accrediting agency. The Provost awards a supplement to the winning department's budget in the amount of \$250 for each permanent instructor (tenure and non-tenure-track faculty, and lecturers). This year's winning departments were selected by a committee representing the Office of the Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness, the General Education Assessment Committee of the Senate Committee on Academic Programs, and the Center for Teaching and Learning.

To be eligible for the award, departments' student learning assessment reports needed to have been posted on WEAVEonline by the due date, have completed all elements of the reports, and provided evidence of using effective assessment practices, e.g., having developed action plans to improve student learning.

This year's winner for departments with professional accreditation is the **Health Professions Department** in the College of Health and Human Sciences. The department, consisting of the units of Nutrition, Physical Therapy, and Respiratory Therapy and programs ranging from two distinctively different undergraduate programs to a doctoral-level program, employed a variety of effective assessment strategies, including capstone courses, portfolios, and effectively integrating the general education learning outcomes into the undergraduate majors. A finalist in this category was the **Department of Educational**

Psychology and Special Education in the College of Education for its application of professional standards across multiple degree and certification programs and for effectively assessing their two doctoral programs using a program-wide committee process to periodically review student progress. The other finalist was the **School of Social Work** in the College of Health and Human Sciences which effectively integrated the general education learning outcomes into the assessment of its undergraduate students.

The **Department of Criminal Justice** in the **College of Health and Human Sciences** was selected as the winner for departments without professional accreditation. The department combined the use of a capstone course, senior examination, fieldwork, and action plans with an emphasis on the skills of the general education learning outcomes to produce an excellent report. The **Department of Religious Studies** was recognized as a finalist in this category for the collaborative manner in which the faculty reviewed students' written work in assessing program effectiveness. The **Department of Physics and Astronomy** was also a finalist and is recognized for the significant improvements they made to their assessment report based on their action plans and feedback they received in 2006.

WEAVEonline® 4.0 New Features

We anticipate that when you submit your 2007-2008 assessment reports that the University will be using WEAVEonline 4.0. The new version of WEAVEonline is due within a couple of months and will have several upgrades that will improve the quality of our reports.

The new WEAVEonline will have a document repository so that you can exhibit a culture of evidence. This will include the ability to view uploaded documents, including examples, rubrics, spreadsheets, syllabi, etc. and to associate each document at the exact point(s) of reference. The system will also provide a master list of documents.

Version 4 will include enhanced support of professional/specialized accreditation; improved editing options (e.g., Availability of comments field, information on who made the last update and when, and a place for comments on *action plans* as they evolve); and an online approval process to enhance review and authorization. The process of monitoring and reporting on results, enhanced analysis options, and action plans will be a major enhancement in the new version. This will include comments fields for noting progress, the ability to see all actions on a single page, and flexibility in setting analysis options.