

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Processes

2009

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
ASSESSMENT PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

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BACKGROUND

American University is a private doctoral research university founded by an Act of Congress in 1893. It has, as its foundation, a profound sense of purpose grounded in its Mission Statement, known as the *Statement of Common Purpose*. This document states that:

The place of American University among major universities with first-rate faculties and academic programs grounded in the arts and sciences is secured by its enduring commitment to uncompromising quality in the education of its students. But its distinctive feature, unique in higher education, is its capacity as a national and international university to turn ideas into action and action into service by emphasizing the arts and sciences, then connecting them to the issues of contemporary public affairs writ large, notably in the areas of government, communication, business, law, and international service.

As an institution committed to excellence, it is natural that AU should dedicate itself to assessing the degree to which it meets its mission and goals. This plan is designed to summarize and document many of the ways in which American University ensures that it is meeting its mission, including its institutional goals and, more specifically, student learning. Because assessment pervades almost everything done at the University, it is impossible to document every assessment effort. Instead, this document is meant to highlight much of the regular, on-going efforts that occur each year.

PHILOSOPHY OF ASSESSMENT

American University is an institution dedicated to fostering a culture of continuous improvement. It sets clear goals and encourages the use of information to assess the degree to which goals are being met.

The AU assessment program is based on the recognition that in order to best meet our mission, goals and objectives we must strive to: 1) clarify our goals and link them to the overall university mission; 2) measure our progress; and 3) apply what we have learned by taking actions which help us to better meet our ultimate objective: providing students with an excellent learning experience.

The university's assessment is characterized by:

- A solid foundation in our overall mission, goals and objectives;
- Centralized support with decentralized ownership of assessment;
- A commitment to assessing all aspects of the university, including student learning, student experiences, and overall institutional effectiveness;
- A recognition of the importance of using a combination of formative and summative approaches to assessment;
- Incorporation of assessment at different levels of the university (such as individual courses, programs, and institution-wide);
- Support for using a wide range of data-gathering techniques, including both qualitative and quantitative assessment measures;
- An emphasis on finding ways to capture direct evidence of success; and
- A recognition that successful assessment requires wide participation by students, faculty, staff and administrators.

American University also recognizes that the actual collection of information – assessment – is only one stage of a more comprehensive process. A strong assessment plan includes:

- Setting clear goals and objectives;
- Establishing methods to assess whether goals and objectives are being met;
- Setting standards for success;
- Assessing progress towards goals; and
- Using information for improvement.

OVERALL INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT

In addition to assessing student learning, the institution has a broad array of ways in which it assesses its overall institutional effectiveness. This section provides a broad sketch of the scope of some of these assessment methods.

ASSESSMENT OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

American University's Strategic Plan was adopted by the Board of Trustees in fall 2008 and implementation strategies were approved by the Board in spring 2009. The Plan is a data-driven document that was developed based on a wealth of campus forums. It was informed by data analysis and external benchmarks. [A copy of the plan and information about the forums and data used in the development of the document is available via the password protected AU Website at: <http://www.american.edu/strategicplan>.]

In order to assess the Strategic Plan, each of the 10 transformational goals and 6 enabling goals has accompanying objectives, action steps and measures. For each measure, the current status of the metric has been established, as well as a two year goal. The details of all the measures were made available to the AU community in a "Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Plan" announced by President Kerwin on March 6, 2009. The plan contains over 100 metrics representing a wide range of data – both qualitative and quantitative – from every division on campus.

Although the report contains very specific measures, President Kerwin emphasizes that "the plan and its implementation will not be static; we will make necessary adjustments as conditions and opportunities change." In order to facilitate assessment of the plan, a Strategic Plan Measurements Project Team has been created. As the university moves forward with implementing the Strategic Plan, the Strategic Plan Measurement Project Team will play an important role in tracking and measuring the Plan's success over the next two years, as well as integrating other assessment into institutional assessment. Working collaboratively with representatives across divisions, they will track the goals and report its progress to the President's Cabinet.

In order to fulfill its responsibilities, the Team will:

- Select a university-wide reporting mechanism that tracks strategic goals, action steps, measures, frequency of measures and reporting, and responsible office(s);

- Develop a strategy for coordinating the gathering of the data;
- Review and refine the current measures for improvement to track at the division/school levels;
- Develop trends and targets through data management and analysis;
- Regularly report progress on the strategic measurements to senior management and incorporate the results into strategic plan progress reports for the community; and
- Integrate other assessment into institutional assessment.

The team consists of representatives from academic and administrative units and constituency members and is co-chaired by Karen Frosliid Jones, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment and Nana An, Executive Director of Budget and Payroll. Progress on the plan is tracked very closely by the President’s Cabinet, the Board of Trustees, and others. In addition, planning continues at the level of schools, colleges, and departments. Unit plans were completed in May 2009. The plans include methods to track progress.

ASSESSMENT BY DIVISION OR AREA

Each summer, divisions hold meetings or retreats to discuss progress made towards the Strategic Plan and to set goals based on the overall university goals. Departments then set goals that are in line with division goals. As part of the planning process departments define metrics that can be used to track their progress. Assessment processes are decentralized, with each department tailoring the methods that best meet their needs. Assessment processes and results are recorded in different ways, with many units writing annual reports.

Summaries of assessment processes are collected periodically using the template, “Understanding Assessment and Institutional Improvement at AU”. This template gathers the following information:

- 1) Department or unit;
- 2) Learning outcomes for students (if set by unit);
- 3) Data or information collected on a regular basis, as well as how it is used;
- 4) Information on one-time assessments done in the past 3-4 years;
- 5) Examples of how assessment is used to change policies, practices, or to inform improvements; and
- 6) Contact information for the assessment “point person”.

Examples of division assessment methods are available by contacting the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT AND THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The staff Performance Management Program (PMP) is designed to stimulate more dynamic goal setting at the university, ensure alignment of goals, reinforce activities and behaviors that support the university's strategic direction, and create better communication between administrators and staff. The program provides a framework under which all university administrators and staff are reviewed for effectiveness.

The program consists of three distinct phases – planning performance expectations, managing performance, and appraising results at the end of the performance cycle. Each summer, after a unit sets its goals, staff members and managers are asked to identify ways for each staff member to best contribute to the attainment of department goals, which in turn support university goals. Assessment measures are agreed upon and standards for evaluating assessment results are set. The process ties together institutional assessment with unit assessment and individual assessment. For more information about the process, please contact Human Resources.

TOOLS/RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR ASSESSMENT

While tools of assessment vary across units, there are some commonalities. The following are some of the more common resources available to units or programs interested in assessing unit effectiveness:

Point of Service Surveys

A number of offices on campus conduct surveys of their clients after they have used their services. Examples of such offices include OIT, "To Fix", and the Career Center. Offices on campus that can identify their users, and who need immediate feedback on the quality of the user experience, are encouraged to implement point of service surveys. For advice about point of service surveys, please contact the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

Survey Research

There is an increasing demand within the A.U. community for information about student attitudes, opinions, and satisfaction levels. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment has responded to this need by developing a comprehensive survey research program. Other offices also contribute to the array of survey research done on campus. AU's survey program includes surveys of freshmen, enrolled students, graduating students, and alumni. The results of these surveys may be available to units across campus. Special analysis of the results may be available upon request. The following surveys are done on an annual basis:

- Freshmen Census (Higher Education Research Institute)
- Graduation Census (Every August and December, but with the heaviest emphasis on Spring)
- Student Evaluation of Teaching (done every year)

The following surveys are conducted every other year:

- Campus Climate Survey (to all undergraduate and graduate students). *Note: As of 2009, the Office of Finance and Treasurer Survey has now been integrated into this survey.*
- Staff/Faculty Campus Climate Survey
- National Survey of Student Engagement (usually administered to all freshmen and seniors, occasionally administered to all students)
- The Your First College Year Survey (Higher Education Research Institute)
- The LibQUAL+ Survey.
- Educational Benchmarking Institute Housing Satisfaction Survey

Other surveys done as needed include:

- CORE Alcohol Survey
- Faculty Survey (Higher Education Research Institute)
- LSSE – Law Survey of Student Engagement
- Student Evaluation of Teaching for distance education
- Alumni Surveys
- Surveys of Washington Semester students
- Surveys of National Student Leadership Conference (NSLC) participants, “Turnitin” users, and others.

Eagledata

Eagledata is a web-accessible source for university statistics and reports that is available to managers and other authorized users inside the AU community. The information presented in Eagledata is extracted nightly from the university's operational data in the Colleague and Benefactor systems. Data are then placed in an Oracle-based data warehouse for storage and reporting. Eagledata also includes assessment data from other sources, such as student evaluations of teaching and reports on faculty load.

Eagledata was created to assist decision-makers as they manage their units and access progress towards goals. It includes information on faculty workload, courses, student enrollment, student characteristics, housing, status of budget, budget projections, graduation rates, retention, and much more. To standardize statistical reporting across campus, Eagledata incorporates the university's official counting rules. For access to Eagledata, AU community members can contact the OIT help desk.

Benchmark Information

The Budget Office compiles a list of indicators benchmarked against a list of market basket schools. The Office of Admissions also compiles a competitive profile report that provides admissions metrics compared to competitive institutions. A wide variety of other benchmark data are available, such as comparison results for the National Survey of Student Engagement, enrollment from the federal reporting system (IPEDS), the Open Doors report on internationalism, the National Science Foundation, US News ranking information, reports known as the Common Data Set, and much more. Many of these reports are available via the Assessment website:

<http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment/Institutional-Assessment.cfm>

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Information about American University is available to the public through a number of venues, including:

Quick Facts – AU has a link on its website for quick facts. It is available at:

<http://www.american.edu/discoverau/fast-facts.cfm>

Academic Data Reference Book – AU produces a ‘fact book’ that provides information on many aspects of the university, such as enrollment, admissions, retention, graduation, and faculty. This book is available in hardcopy at Bender Library. An electronic version is available at:

<http://www.american.edu/academic.depts/provost/oir/adrb/index.html>

Accreditation – Information about AU’s Middle States Accreditation is available on the Middle States Website <http://www.msche.org>. Copies of the latest AU self-study and other accreditation documents are available at <http://www.american.edu/middlestates>. For a complete list of programs that are accredited see: <http://www.american.edu/discoverau/accreditation.cfm>.

AU Survey Results – Summaries of the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Freshmen Census, the Graduation Census and other surveys are available on the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment Website. The current link is:

<http://www.american.edu/academic.depts/provost/oir/index.html>

College Navigator – Information about AU is available through “College Navigator” web-based database containing specific information about 7,000 universities nation-wide.

<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>

Common Data Set – The “Common Data Set” includes information about admissions, enrollment, financial aid, clubs, and other aspects of undergraduate life. While all institutions submit this information to the College Board, not every institution makes its report publically available. AU’s information is posted on the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment Website. The current link is: <http://www.american.edu/academic.depts/provost/oir/CommonDataSet.pdf>

Strategic Plan – Information on progress on the Strategic Plan is available on the Strategic Plan Website, <http://www.american.edu/strategicplan>.

UCAN – AU participants in “UCAN”, the University and College Accountability Network. Information about AU is found at:

<http://members.ucan-network.org/american>

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

Faculty Senate Committee on Learning Assessment

In May 2009, the Faculty Senate integrated the university Learning Outcomes and Assessment Team (LOAT) into the Senate. The new Committee will be called the Senate Learning Assessment Committee (LAC).¹ According to the Senate Resolution, the committee's jurisdiction covers: The College of Arts and Sciences, School of Public Affairs, School of Communication, School of International Services, Kogod School of Business, Washington College of Law, University Library, General Education Program, Honors Program, and University College.

Membership

Membership includes:

- One full-time faculty member from each of the academic units except for CAS, which shall have two full-time faculty members. The full-time faculty of each unit shall elect its member or members and elected members shall serve a two-year term.
- One representative from General Education, one from Honors, and one from University College, each appointed by the director of the respective program. These representatives shall serve a two-year term.
- The Director of Institutional Research and Assessment shall be an *ex-officio*, non-voting member of this committee.

As the committee transitions from the Project Team to a Faculty Senate Committee, committee members from the Project Team will be invited to serve on the Faculty Senate Committee for 2009-2010, either for a one or two-year term. To stagger the committee membership over a two-year period, it is recommended that for the academic year 2010-2011, half of the committee members shall be elected while the other half of the members serve an additional year. The Committee members will elect a chair.

Charge

The charge of the committee is to provide guidance and assistance to the colleges and schools in developing and implementing academic program assessment plans, analyzing and interpreting assessment results, developing appropriate reports, and disseminating assessment results to the University community. The committee will oversee the annual process of updating and disseminating assessment plans.

The committee interacts with other stakeholders, such as the Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Studies, Vice-Provost for Graduate Studies and Research, Center for Teaching Excellence, and Campus Life. The committee will submit a written report to the Faculty Senate each December.

¹ The Learning Outcomes and Assessment Team changes its official name to the Learning Assessment Committee in Fall 2009. Until the transition is complete, this report references both groups.

Mission

The Committee's mission (written in 2006) is as follows:

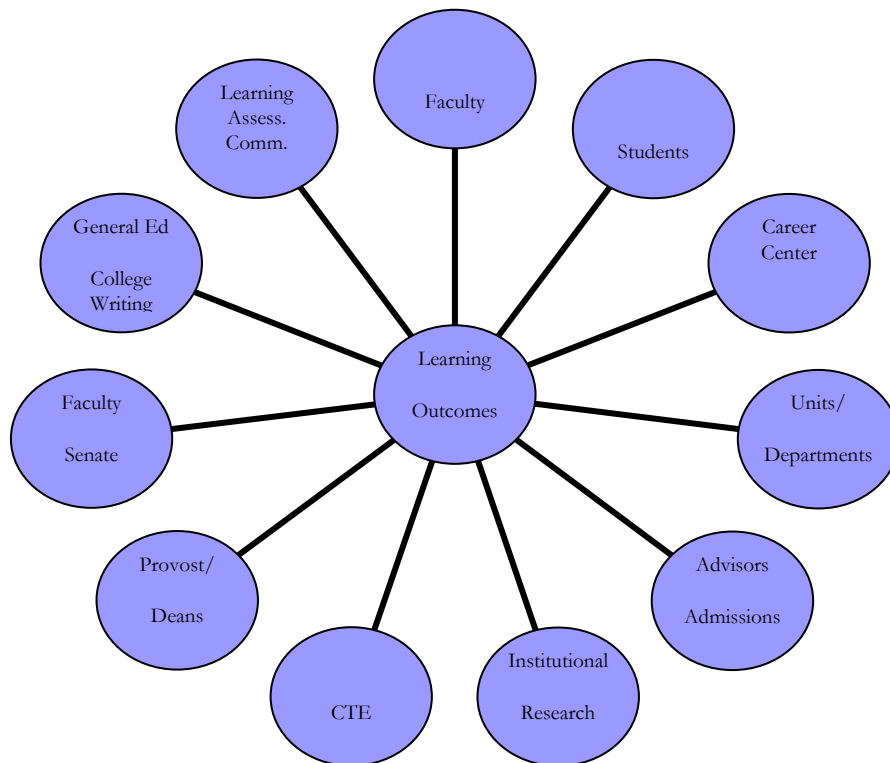
- To focus on understanding and improving student learning. Assessment is the tool that can enable a department to determine whether it is meeting its goals in student learning, but it is not the 'end' - it is a means to an end.
- To support and facilitate assessment activities that can best improve student learning.
- To facilitate the development of learning objectives across campus and to facilitate knowledge about these objectives.
- To foster the collection and dissemination of assessment information.
- To support, foster and document the appropriate use of assessment information for program improvement and promotion.

VISION STATEMENT

In spring 2008, the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Team reviewed its mission and wrote the following vision statement for assessment of student learning overall:

American University is committed to the process of setting learning outcomes, assessing progress, and using assessment results to achieve academic goals. AU actively supports faculty and academic offices through a commitment of resources to achieve these goals.

This vision statement articulates the Team's broader goal of infusing a culture of learning and assessment across campus. It is recognized that the Team's role is only one among many. The vision is to fully integrate assessment into the AU community. Assessment and student learning is the responsibility of many across campus, as this figure illustrates:



- Faculty: work collectively in programs to set and assess outcomes and use outcomes to amend academic programs.
- Provost and Deans: provide leadership and support of resources.
- Students: learning outcomes are communicated to students. In some cases, students complete portfolios (or other projects) which are used to demonstrate the outcomes.
- Units/Departments: monitor the process of learning outcomes and use the assessment to achieve academic goals.
- IT: provide technical assistance for software that supports the process.
- Admissions: communicate to prospective students about AU's vision.
- Advisors: communicate to current students about the learning outcomes process.
- Community Service/Career Center: oversee community service and internships that may contribute to learning outcomes.
- Center for Teaching Excellence: provide workshops on writing and reporting on learning outcomes and guidance to faculty on interpretation of the assessment.
- Faculty Senate: set academic policies that support the process of learning outcomes and assessment.
- General Education Program and College Writing Program: set learning outcomes associated with their curriculum and advance the overall learning goals of the institution.
- Office of Institutional Research and Assessment: responsible for assisting offices in the development and implementation of learning outcomes and assessment strategies. Provides guidance and support in communicating AU's assessment to accreditors and others.
- Campus Life: responsible for offering articulated learning outcomes related to their work.
- Learning Assessment Committee: responsible for offering leadership and facilitation for the entire process.

Benefits of Reaching the Vision

Reaching the vision of a fully integrated learning outcomes and assessment culture is one that AU values. It is recognized that achievement of the vision is not something that can simply be achieved. It is a *process* as well as a destination. However, the benefits of more fully meeting the vision are numerous. If realized:

- The process of learning outcomes and assessment would be fully immersed in the culture of AU;
- It would strengthen academic relationships across the AU campus;
- It would strengthen the sense of vision/purpose for programs;

- Faculty-driven improvements would lead to stronger programs;
- It would create opportunities to use results to:
 - Focus energies on areas most in need of improvement;
 - Communicate AU's unique strengths;
 - Demonstrate accountability to our publics (parents, alums, etc.); and
 - Meet or exceed accreditation standards.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AT THE COURSE LEVEL

Individual courses are at the heart of student learning at any university. At American University, the primary focus of the actual assessment process is at the program/major level. However, all courses should have articulated learning outcomes or course objectives. AU endorses the following principles with regards to the articulation of learning outcomes at the course level:

- All courses are expected to articulate learning outcomes or course objectives. These outcomes should be communicated to students, either on the syllabus, on Blackboard, or some other method.
- Deans stress the importance of articulating course-level learning outcomes or objectives. The General Education Director and others also communicate the importance of communicating course objectives.
- Support is available for faculty. The Center for Teaching Excellence will continue to offer workshops and sessions on how to write effective learning outcomes for courses. Individual assistance is provided by CTE when requested. Other offices or departments on campus are also available to assist faculty. For example, the University Library provides assistance to faculty who want to incorporate information literacy objectives into their course.
- Proposals for new courses should include the expected learning outcomes with its submission.
- AU monitors whether students report that they understand the course objectives. One way the university tracks the degree to which learning objectives have been communicated is by asking students three related questions on the Student Evaluation of Teaching:
 - “The learning objectives for this course were clear.”
 - “Activities/assignments required for the class contributed to meeting the learning objectives of the course.”
 - “Materials required for this course contributed to meeting the learning objectives.”

Results of the Student Evaluation are available to faculty, deans, and students.

MAJOR/PROGRAM LEVEL ASSESSMENT PLANS

Plan Requirements

Each program or major at American University is expected to develop and implement a comprehensive assessment plan. This plan includes:

- The articulation of expected learning outcomes for the program/major.
- Clear methods for assessing the degree to which learning objectives are being met.
- Standards for determining the degree to which goals are met.
- A summary of assessment activities and results;
- Evidence that results are used to improve and/or market programs.
- A timeline for implementing a complete assessment cycle.

The following guidelines should be used in the development of the plan:

Definition of program/major. Departments can decide exactly how it would like to define their programs or majors. In most cases, departments will develop assessment plans for each major. There may be cases, however, where it is more helpful to develop plans at the level of “concentrations” rather than major. Assessments should inform program improvement, and units should decide how they can best set up plans to facilitate such improvement.

Assessment methods. Ideally, programs are expected to use a variety of assessment methods, including at least one direct measure of assessment for each learning outcome.

Plans should be simple and do-able. Emphasis is on creating plans that can be implemented given the usual constraints of faculty availability and funding. A do-able plan is one in which a complete cycle of assessment can be completed in 3-5 years.

Plans should be useful. The ideal plan is one which helps the department focus on issues that are of critical importance to it. Units who find that the assessment process is not useful are strongly encouraged to work with the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Team and CTE to revise the plan to better meet their needs.

Web Access. Learning outcomes and plans for each program are posted on a website open to the public. An update on each assessment plan’s implementation is posted on a password-protected website.

Communication. In order for the plan to be useful to students, units are encouraged to find ways (in addition to the official website) to communicate the learning objectives of their program to prospective and current students.

Review of Assessment Plans

Departments are expected to provide the Learning Assessment Committee with an update that summarizes progress made in implementing their assessment plan by October 1 of each year. Departments may submit an updated version of their assessment plan (documenting recent activity)

to fulfill this request. The Learning Assessment Committee will review the updates, provide feedback, and report to the Senate on overall progress.

Most units get feedback from a group or person within their school/college which reviews plans (see descriptions below) and deans are encouraged to use this organization as a resource. In addition, the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Team is available to the departments and the deans, should they want assistance with understanding how to more effectively use the learning outcome and assessment process to better meet their goals. Deans have the ultimate authority for ensuring that departments make adequate progress on implementing assessment plans.

When reviewing plans, the focus is on the degree to which units are actively working to identify the strengths of their program and areas for improvement, and then using that information effectively. Thus, the ideal department is not necessarily one that demonstrates that it meets all its learning goals. Departments that can demonstrate that they know the strengths and weaknesses of their program, and are actively working to make improvements to their program, are considered successful.

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT

Support for promoting learning outcomes and assessment comes in many forms.

Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) –OIRA provides administrative support to units who are interested in advancing its assessment efforts. It can work with units to find data that can best meet their needs and it can help units access institutional data (such as student or course profile information) or survey data that is specific to their unit. The office also provides advice and support in cases where units would like to use more qualitative methods, such as focus groups. In addition, the Office is responsible for advancing the university’s accreditation efforts and can assist units that would like to better understand accreditation expectations. OIRA’s director is a member of the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Team and helps to coordinate the work of the Team with other units on campus.

Learning Assessment Committee (LAC) – The mission of the Learning Assessment Committee has been described elsewhere in this document. Members of the team are available to provide one-on-one assistance to units who need help with developing learning outcomes, designing assessment strategies, and implementing plans. The Team works in conjunction with OIRA to ensure that faculty have the resources that they need to be successful. Any questions or concerns about the process can be addressed to the Team.

Workshops - Each academic year, the LAC, in conjunction with the Center for Teaching Excellence, is responsible for providing workshops and training opportunities for faculty across campus. In the past, this has included workshops on topics such as getting started with assessment, using capstones, using internships, graduate program assessment, and incorporating learning objectives into the syllabi. Faculty members who have ideas for workshops or training sessions can contact the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment or any member of the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Team.

Web Resources – American University has an assessment website that provides faculty with a number of resources including:

- Information on upcoming workshops and access to materials from previous workshops;
- Bibliography of assessment books and articles available in AU's library;
- Links to materials such as Middle States' assessment handbook and Middle States expectations;
- Links to examples of assessment plans at other institutions with specific examples in AU's fields of study;
- Links to information about specific assessment techniques and measures; and
- Information about AU's Learning Outcomes and Assessment Team and contact information in case assistance is needed.

School/College Support Structures

American University recognizes that to be successful, assessment of student learning must be supported at both the institution and school/college level. AU has a decentralized system that enables schools and colleges to implement different ways to advance assessment. To that end, the following school/college structures and processes are in place:

College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)

Three faculty members within CAS have responsibility for working with units in CAS to ensure that learning outcomes are articulated, assessment plans are in place, and progress is being made in plan implementation. The three-person team has divided up responsibility for covering CAS so that each department has a specific representative that they can call on should they need assistance. This team meets regularly with the Dean to update her on the School's progress. The Dean's Chair's meetings serve as a venue for the College to discuss issues related to assessment.

Kogod School of Business (KSB)

To assure continuous and comprehensive assessments in KSB programs, a three-year assessment is being implemented. An important component of the learning outcomes and assessment at KSB is the establishment of the Kogod Curriculum and Assessments Committee (CAC). The CAC is comprised of representatives of each of the six departments, KSB's Associate Dean for Academic Programs, KSB's Academic Affairs Coordinator, and KSB's Senior Associate Dean. The CAC is chaired by a faculty member. Members of the committee work with department chairs and faculty to coordinate, support and maintain student learning assessment processes in their respective departments.

School of Communication (SOC)

The School of Communication has three divisions that have separate missions and therefore have separate outcomes and assessment plans. Within each division there may be more than one program (e.g. graduate and undergraduate). Each of the three divisions has used a collaborative approach in developing and implementing the plans – they are discussed in division meetings and one or more of the faculty in each division is designated to take the lead in formalizing the plans. Some activities, however, cross over all three divisions. These include the graduating student survey, faculty retreats, contacts with alumni, and some ad hoc research. A commitment has been made for a standing committee beginning in Academic Year 2009-10. This committee will include representatives from each of the divisions and will be coordinated by the Associate Dean. It will review the outcomes and

assessment process for the School of Communication as a whole, determining priorities for the upcoming year in a streamlined, non-duplicative fashion. It will also ensure that assessment takes place and that the results are used in planning for the school's programs.

School of International Service (SIS)

The School of International Service has developed a collaborative, faculty-driven assessment process that will continue in the five-year implementation phase. While the SIS field directors' meetings are the primary venue for assessment coordination, the nature of the SIS degree programs – the liberal arts Undergraduate program, the professional Master's programs, and the scholarly PhD program – require that our assessment be both field-specific and school-/university-wide. Therefore, at the Undergraduate level, the eight field directors carry out field-specific assessment processes with their faculty while the Undergraduate Studies Committee reviews degree-wide assessment activities, including those in Language and Foreign Studies and AU Abroad. At the Master's level, the eight field directors plus two program directors carry out field-specific assessment processes with their faculty based on shared MA-wide learning outcomes. At the PhD level, the PhD director is responsible for the program assessment and implementation, and reports these actions to the PhD Committee comprised of faculty representatives from the SIS fields. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs is responsible for assisting the field directors, program directors, PhD director, Undergraduate Studies Committee, and others in carrying out these assessment activities and ensuring that the results are incorporated in strategic, budgetary, and curricular planning. Information on assessment processes and results will continue to be shared at field and program meetings, Field Director meetings, SIS Council meetings, and faculty retreats.

School of Public Affairs (SPA)

All departments and programs in SPA meet at least annually, usually every semester, in core faculty groups to review and assess student results on learning outcomes and to recommend any needed changes. The Department of Government meets every semester in core faculty groups to review and assess results on learning outcomes and to recommend any needed changes. After the core faculty teaching in each program meet to review the data and make recommendations, these are then reported to the department chair. The department chair convenes a meeting of the full department faculty every spring for a meeting to assess the data on learning outcomes and recommendations. The faculty as a whole then act on any recommendations for needed changes in teaching, curriculum, and sequence of courses. The Department of Public Administration and Policy also meets every semester to review assessment results and recommend changes. The Department of Justice, Law and Society and the doctoral program faculty meet every spring to review its learning outcomes, consider student feedback on the program, and measure progress. In addition to the department structures, the Associate Dean of the school monitors the progress made by each department and assists in advancing the overall assessment efforts of the school.

Washington College of Law (WCL)

The Washington College of Law focuses its assessment at the course level. Overall learning outcomes are mapped to specific required and elective courses in WCL. Faculty teaching the courses have responsibility for assessment, and the results are review by the Dean and Associate Deans.

THE ROLE OF PROGRAM REVIEW IN ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

American University instituted a program review process and the first programs underwent review in spring 2009. Each department will be on a seven year cycle. As part of program review, each department's assessment plan plays a key role. In the review units must demonstrate:

1. How student learning outcomes are measured at the course and degree program level and the success of these outcomes over a seven year period;
2. How learning objectives at the course level attached to those at the degree level;
3. Evidence that expected program learning outcomes are effectively communicated to students and that learning outcomes are also articulated at the course level; and
4. That processes are in place within the department for improving academic quality based upon assessments measures.

The Learning Outcomes and Assessment Team and the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment work closely with departments undergoing program review to ensure that it can meet expectations. Because each review provides the opportunity for external evaluation, the process ensures that the assessment plans have periodic review by someone outside the institution. For more information about the program review process, including the outline of the report submitted by departments, please contact the Office of the Provost.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING AT THE INSTITUTION LEVEL

Assessment of student learning is at the heart of many different aspects of campus life, and is not just confined to academic units. Across the institution, there is a recognition that learning happens in many places, and in many different ways. For this reason, the university template "Understanding Assessment and Institutional Improvement at American University" is used by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment to identify their learning outcomes and goals across the institution. Units are asked to articulate their expected learning outcomes, and to assess whether they are being met.

Examples of institutional assessment activity that are central to AU's overall mission are as follows:

The General Education Program

The General Education Program is divided into five Curricular Areas; each Area has three learning outcome goals associated with it, and there are also six goals for the Program as a whole. Each year, one Curricular Area and two of the overall Program goals are selected for review. Coordination of the review is overseen by the Director of the program in conjunction with the General Educational Assessment Coordinator (who is a member of the faculty). Each year, they appoint a team of faculty members to review student work and provide the Director with a report that assesses student progress and provides recommendations. The Assessment Coordinator facilitates the use of assessment results. Recommendations are reviewed by the Director with the assistance of the standing General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate. The General Education Committee is responsible for implementing recommendations. In order to integrate the assessment of General Education with broader university goals, the Director is a member of the Learning Assessment Committee.

College Writing

In 2008, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences appointed a College Writing Task Force to review the College Writing Program. As part of the review, the group is reviewing appropriateness of the learning outcomes for the program, the role of the program in the overall mission of the institution, and the overall effectiveness of the program. The group may issue a report in spring 2009.

Math

The Department of Math and Statistics conducted a complete review of the non-major courses in 2006, which resulted in the, "Report of the Math Requirement Working Group." The report suggested that it would be advisable to create an additional course which would teach broader mathematical goals. In that spirit, the Department has focused its assessment efforts on specific math courses, such as Finite Math. It piloted the use of a new textbook and conducted a survey comparing the traditional math class, with the class using the new, broader textbook. The department continues to refine its courses by piloting changes, and assessing results.

Special Programs (including University College, Learning Communities, Washington Mentorship, and Honors)

The university is dedicated to providing special programs with resources it needs to understand overall program effectiveness and success. While each program conducts its assessment in slightly different ways there are some commonalities:

- Focus groups. Focus groups are used early in the semester, so that programmatic issues are addressed early. Focus groups of others involved in the program, such as faculty, are also conducted;
- Surveys. Students are surveyed about the experience in the program, and the degree to which expected learning outcomes are met;
- Retention, student success, and other institutional data. Student retention rates are tracked and compared to students outside the program. Other institutional data are also used;
- Use of institutional survey information. Institutional surveys, such as NSSE, the Campus Climate Survey, and the Graduation Survey are broken out so that comparisons by program are available;
- Longitudinal analysis. For all programs, long term effects of the program are tracked. This includes tracking graduation rates, success in getting into graduate school, and other important indicators.

THE ROLE OF SPECIALIZED ACCREDITATION

American University is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. To be accredited, one must meet 14 "Characteristics of Excellence", including one on institutional assessment and one on assessment of student learning. In addition to Middle States, many departments or schools are accredited by organizations that have rigorous standards for program assessment. The Department of Public Affairs, for example, submits annual reports to the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs Administration (NASPAA) as part of the continuing accreditation process. The following departments or programs are accredited by organizations with requirements related to student learning and assessment:

Department of Chemistry – Accredited by the American Chemical Society (ACS).

Kogod School of Business –Accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.

School of Communication journalism and public communication programs – Accredited by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Washington College of Law – Accredited by the American Bar Association.

Music Program in the Department of Performing Arts – Accredited by National Association of Schools of Music

Department of Psychology – Accredited by the American Psychological Association.

School of Public Affairs – Accredited by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration

For more information about the accreditation processes and the results, please contact the respective schools/colleges.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

The expected learning outcomes and assessment plans for each program are posted on the Provost's website at: <http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment>.

CONCLUSION:

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ASSESSMENT AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Assessment is a critical component of all AU's processes and procedures. This document is meant to be a basic review of some of the more basic components of AU's assessment strategy. For more details about assessment at AU, please feel free to contact the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, at (202) 885-6155 or at oir@american.edu. You may also visit the AU Assessment Website: <http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment>

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