Assessment of Student Learning in Academic Programs
A Snapshot of the Process

Assessment of student learning in the academic program is ultimately intended to assist faculty and staff in making decisions about the program of study: what and how to teach in the classroom, what courses to include in the curriculum, how to sequence the curriculum, and what student experiences to include in and out of the classroom, etc. Responsibility for the assessment of program-specific student learning objectives lies with the individual department. Some of a department's objectives are expected to align with the QEP and General Education strategic directions, while others will be unique to the department.

Assessing student learning begins with the articulation of what it is that students should know, think, feel or be able to do by the end of their time in the program of study. Stating these items in terms of student learning objectives is the first step in the assessment process. Faculty then identify what program experiences (courses, seminars, research, etc.) help students achieve the desired objectives, identify the methods with which to assess the student learning objectives, the timeline for data collection, the parties responsible for the data collection, analysis, and reporting, and the anticipated use of the analysis.

Assessing student learning continues with the examination and evaluation of assessment methods results to determine what changes or actions need to be made to facilitate improvement. Once implemented, these meaningful changes must be documented and evidence of these changes must be provided.

Step 1: Student Learning Objectives. Program faculty and staff articulate intended, end-of-program student learning objectives. Student learning objectives are measureable, actionable, and focus on student behavior.

- *What are our program's student learning goals and objectives?*
- *For each of our stated goals, what are the specific student behaviors, skills, or abilities that would tell us this goal is being achieved?*
- *What will students be able to know, think, do or feel as a result of this program of study/ educational experience?*
- *Describe our ideal student in terms of strengths, skills, knowledge and values, and identify which of these characteristics are the result of the program experience.*
- *For each of our stated objectives, which ones also embed/align with the QEP and/or General Education strategic directions?*

Step 2: Curriculum Map. Program faculty and staff create a Curriculum Map by mapping the student learning objectives to the program.

- *In which courses do students achieve learning of each student learning objective?*
- *From which learning experiences do students develop knowledge and skills stated in each student learning objective?*

Step 3: Assessment Methods. Program faculty agree upon the actual student performance that will be evaluated, and on the assessment instruments and processes that will provide clear and useful information regarding student performance. Most assessment methods are embedded in academic programs and/or classes. Both direct and indirect methods are used. Departments can draw on assessment data collected through institutional sources (e.g., findings regarding general education, from institution-level surveys, from co-curricular, extra-curricular, student services, or residential programs) where relevant.

- *What does it look like when a student can_____?*
- *How do we know when students are 'getting it'?*
- *What assessment methods will we use to collect data about what our students have learned?*
- *What are our criteria for success?*
- *How will we know the objectives have been met?*
- *What level of performance meets each objective?*
- *How will we interpret and evaluate the data?*
- *How often will this assessment occur? How often will we evaluate it?*

Step 4: **Data Collection and Analysis.** Program faculty collect and analyze data. Additional outside data may be used for supplemental analysis. Data and analyses are presented to faculty and staff for evaluation and consideration of implications. Departments use findings for internal decision-making.

- *How will the results of assessment be used?*
- *Who needs to know the results?*
- *How can we improve our program and assessment process?*
- *What do these data tell us?*
- *What is working well and should be continued or expanded?*
- *Where are our students' performance below expectations?*

Step 5: Meaningful Change or Action. Meaningful change or action, sometimes thought of as use of results or closing the loop, describes the process of identifying factors that affect student learning, and taking action to improve student learning. These changes and/or actions must be directly related to the results of the data collection and analysis. Meaningful changes or actions are reported in the past, after they have been implemented or have occurred.

- *Why was the change made?*
- *What results/observations of the assessment data indicate that a change was needed?*
- *What data/information showed a change was needed?*
- *Includes examples of completed changes to improve student learning*
- *Changes are directly related to results*
- *Describes action to improve student learning or the assessment process*
- *References documentation of evidence supporting implementation of meaningful change.*

Step 6: Evidence Collection. Evidence must be provided that the meaningful change or action has occurred. This evidence may be in the form of a new or revised course, syllabus, rubric, lesson, assessment, curriculum change form, catalog information, etc.

- *What evidence demonstrates the change?*
- *What evidence exists that shows the change was made?*
- *On what specific results is this change/action based?*

Step 7: Process and Timeline. Articulate the process, procedures, responsibilities and schedules for the entire assessment plan. Departments develop their own timetables for data collection, analysis, and use. Each department's chair is responsible for overseeing the development of that unit's plan for assessing student learning. In many cases, assessment committees are selected to carry out that work. (Academic Support Reporting Unit Plans are submitted each year, typically during October.)

- *When will we collect the data?*
- *How often?*
- *Who will be responsible for collecting, interpreting, and reporting the results?*
- *When are activities occurring?*

The assessment process spans a five year period. It is not necessary to assess every objective each year, although it is expected that each objective will be evaluated at least twice within the five year period. It is also important to recognize that data collection, analysis of results, making meaningful change, and providing evidence do not have to occur within the same year. In fact, it seems more likely that these items would span at the minimum two years: during the first, data would be collected and/or analyzed (of which the results would be reported); and during year two, the meaningful change would be implemented (at the completion of which, evidence would be documented).