

## Assessment of Student Learning in Degree Programs

(Faculty Senate 10/11/90; updated 3/27/14)

**Introduction.** The following policy governs the system for regular and ongoing assessment of student learning in WSU undergraduate, professional and graduate degree programs.

**Definition.** For the purposes of this policy, *assessment* refers to assessment at the program level, focusing on student learning in the program of study for a degree. Program assessment is an ongoing process to support educational quality and student achievement.

**Purpose.** The purpose for program assessment of student learning is to provide an accurate and honest appraisal of where students fully meet expected program-level learning outcomes, where there is room for improvement, and what strategies faculty, departments, colleges, and WSU are using to support and improve student learning. Assessment results can provide valuable information to faculty and program leadership to assist them in making informed decisions regarding their programs. WSU seeks to ensure that assessment occurs consistently and systematically and that its results contribute to university-wide planning that supports quality education.

**Essential elements.** Every degree must publish student learning outcomes and implement a faculty-developed plan to assess student learning, including measure(s) near the end of the program of study. The Office of the Provost, with input from the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning, the Graduate School, and their respective advisory councils, may specify other requirements to support useful assessment and meet standards for WSU's accreditation (see policies of interest, appended).

**Responsibilities and Process.** Roles and responsibilities for program assessment are outlined below. These may be adapted as needed by undergraduate, professional and graduate programs or by programs or colleges with specialized accreditation or highly individualized programs of study; the program's assessment plan should specify any alternative distribution of responsibilities and processes. The purpose of designating roles and responsibilities is to efficiently provide useful assessment in each program's context, meet requirements for specialized accreditation or licensure, contribute data to the institution, and support WSU's accreditation.

**Faculty.** For each degree, faculty with teaching responsibilities have a primary role in assessing student achievement of clearly identified, program-level student learning outcomes. Learning outcomes should guide the curriculum and be widely-publicized (e.g. department website, student handbook) and periodically reviewed for currency and utility, with input from appropriate stakeholders. Methods of assessment should include both direct and indirect measures, may vary from program to program, may rely on sampling, and may include external measures, e.g. licensure examinations. Ideally, all faculty within a program, particularly those with teaching responsibilities, regularly review, discuss, and decide how to act on assessment data.

**Department/School** The chair/school/program director is responsible for working with faculty to a) ensure each degree program has learning outcomes and an assessment plan that involves all campuses offering the degree, including online degrees, b) implement the program's assessment plan, c) share results with faculty on all campuses offering the degree, and d) manage implementation of program improvements based on assessment results. With coordinating assistance from the Office of the Assessment of Teaching and Learning, the chair/director reports on assessment annually to the dean, urban campus leadership for multi-campus programs, and the provost. Graduate and professional program chairs/directors report to the Graduate School on an annual basis. Reports include information adequate for interpretation of the data, including the role of faculty in assessment, and use of assessment data in decisions, improvements, or planning. Results and improvements should be coordinated and discussed with the dean and campus leadership, as appropriate.

Leaders of degree programs outside a department or school structure have the same assessment responsibilities as a chair or school director.

**College Dean/Campus Leadership**. The dean is responsible for implementing effective assessment of student learning college-wide; establishing appropriate procedures and resources in the college; ensuring data flow and availability to appropriate constituencies on all campuses; monitoring aggregate and disaggregate results; using results of assessment of student learning to inform strategic planning and academic or learning support planning and practices designed to enhance student achievement. The dean is responsible for appropriately involving other campus leadership, such as vice chancellors, academic directors, or other designees who are responsible for implementing program assessment on their campuses. **Institutional leadership**

Provost. Annually, the Provost reviews and shares the status of assessment with leadership and appropriate university constituencies in a timely manner.

Dean of Graduate School. The Graduate School assists, coordinates and reviews graduate and professional program assessment. Annually, the Dean of the Graduate School reviews and shares the status of graduate and professional program assessment with leadership and appropriate university constituencies in a timely manner.

Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning: The Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning assists, coordinates and reviews undergraduate program assessment. Annually, the director of the OATL reviews and shares the status of undergraduate program assessment with leadership and appropriate university constituencies in a timely manner.

## **Participation in Assessment.**

**Annual Review.** The Provost, Deans, and department/school heads are expected to recognize and acknowledge faculty and staff participation in assessment activities through the annual review process at all levels.

**Academic Freedom.** Faculty Senate affirms that assessment requirements do not violate academic freedom, and that responsibilities for assessment are addressed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities Statement on Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibilities (2006):

Faculty are responsible for establishing goals for student learning, for designing and implementing programs of general education and specialized study that intentionally cultivate the intended learning, and for assessing students' achievement. In these matters, faculty must work collaboratively with their colleagues in their departments, schools, and institutions as well as with relevant

administrators. Academic freedom is necessary not just so faculty members can conduct their individual research and teach their own courses but so they can enable students- through whole programs of study- to acquire the learning they need to contribute to society.

**Resources and Good Practices.** Good practices and resources are available through the Provost Office, the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning, and the Graduate School to support faculty, programs, and leadership in assessment, and help coordinate efforts.

**University Accreditation.** Program assessment activities and use of results are essential to maintaining WSU's accreditation by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (see related policies of interest below).

**Periodic Review.** The process of program assessment will be reviewed periodically by the Provost, Graduate School and college and campus leadership, and Faculty Senate, and necessary adjustments made so that assessment efforts provide useful data based on sustainable practices, and support continuing institutional accreditation. Periodic input will also be sought from colleges, campuses, and departments.

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### Related policies of interest

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). <http://nwccu.org/index.htm>

NWCCU is our regional accreditor. Standards for maintaining the university's accreditation include the following:

Eligibility Requirement 22. Student Achievement: The institution identifies and publishes the expected learning outcomes for each of its degree and certificate programs. The institution engages in regular and ongoing assessment to validate student achievement of these learning outcomes.

Standard 4.A.3. The institution documents, through an effective, regular, and comprehensive system of

assessment of student achievement, that students who complete its educational courses, programs, and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, achieve identified course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Faculty with teaching responsibilities are responsible for evaluating student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes.

Standard 4.A.6. The institution regularly reviews its assessment processes to ensure they appraise authentic achievements and yield meaningful results that lead to improvement.

Standard 4.B.2. The institution uses the results of its assessment of student learning to inform academic and learning- support planning and practices that lead to enhancement of student learning achievements. Results of student learning assessments are made available to appropriate constituencies in a timely manner.

Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/>

Established as a new cabinet-level state agency on July 1, 2012, the Washington Student Achievement Council provides strategic planning, oversight, and advocacy to support increased student success and higher levels of educational attainment in Washington. WSAC publishes data on student achievement and makes recommendations to the legislature.

WSU Executive Policy #29 (5/5/2009) <http://www.wsu.edu/forms2/ALTPDF/EPM/EP29.pdf>

This policy identifies responsibilities for multi-campus program assessment, including Student Outcomes Assessment as follows: Department and schools are responsible for overseeing student outcome assessment on all campuses contributing to/participating in the program. Campus academic directors are responsible for implementing departmental/ school student outcomes assessment processes on their campuses.

WSU Faculty Manual

Pursuant to the mission of the University (*Faculty Manual* (2010), p. 2-3), WSU is mandated to provide specific educational outcomes to its undergraduate and graduate students. In fulfillment of this mission, academic responsibility for a given

academic unit is from the academic faculty through the chair or director, through the academic dean and to the Provost

(*Faculty Manual* (2010), Section I:A, p. 7).