

Guidelines for Documenting the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at the University of Pittsburgh

The commitment of each of the schools and campuses of the University of Pittsburgh to excellence in instruction requires a comparable commitment to a culture of assessment through which we continually evaluate the success of our educational programs and feed the results of those assessments back into our academic planning processes. The *ad hoc* Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes recommends to the Council of Deans that it is time to undertake an initiative through which we can document our assessment processes, develop new assessment procedures where those are warranted as part of the strategic planning effort, and establish standards that enable us to assure ourselves and our many constituencies that these processes are effective and adequate to ensure continuing improvement in the quality and effectiveness of our academic programs.

Each school's and campus' goals for student learning outcomes should be consistent with the University's goals for all of our graduates – that our students be able to think critically and analytically; gather and evaluate information effectively and appropriately; understand and be able to apply basic, scientific and quantitative reasoning; communicate clearly and effectively; use information technology appropriate to their discipline; exhibit mastery of their discipline; understand and appreciate diverse cultures (both locally and internationally); work effectively with others; and have a sense of self, responsibility to others, and connectedness to the University.

Programs to be assessed:

Schools and Campuses should ensure that there is a process in place to assess academic programs at each of the following levels:

- All degree or certificate granting programs listed in the graduate and undergraduate bulletins;
- At a minimum each major at each degree level should be assessed, e.g.
 - Associate of Science in Nursing,
 - Bachelor of Science in Mathematics,
 - Master of Public Health,
 - Doctor of Philosophy in English;
 - MD, JD, MPPM, MAT, EdD, MSW, etc.
- Schools and campuses may choose to aggregate majors with strong overlap in goals and curricula for the purposes of assessment;
- Optionally: Departments and programs may assess Areas of Concentrations within majors;
- Dual degree programs (e.g. BA/BS, MA/MS, MD/PhD), and joint degree programs (BS in Econ/Statistics) should be assessed if these are separate programs for the purposes of assessing student learning outcomes. Departments should make that decision after considering if the programs have considerably different goals and outcomes that would warrant separate assessment plans;
- School- and campus-level general education curricula.

Components of the Assessment Process:

For each program and for their general education curriculum, schools and regional campuses should document the following components of the assessment process:

- An articulation of program mission/goals which reflects national disciplinary norms as well as any unique features of the University of Pittsburgh program;
- Identification of three to five educational outcomes;
- Identification of methods of assessment including:
 - When in the curriculum, and how, learning outcomes will be assessed,
 - At least some direct evidence,
 - Periodic validation external to the course and instructor, if a specific course is part of the assessment.
- Standards of comparison/target for results of assessment;
- A process of faculty and administrative review that ensures results are used for program improvement.

Schools and campuses are encouraged to use multi-year assessments, in which progress towards some goals are assessed less frequently than annually, but it is expected that goals will be chosen that warrant assessment at least every three to five years.

- Assessment of specific outcomes may be based on a sample of students.

Programs may request permission to substitute a professional accreditation process as the assessment protocol by showing how that professional accreditation process maps onto the institutional framework for assessment.

Responsibility for Assessment

- Program faculty are responsible for the development and administration of the assessment processes of individual programs in accordance with the appropriate programmatic or departmental governance structure;
- Department chairs are responsible for coordinating the assessment process for departmentally-based programs; deans, directors, and campus presidents are responsible for coordinating the assessment process for school- and campus-based programs;
- Schools and regional campuses are responsible for developing internal procedures for documenting program assessment;
- Deans, directors, and campus presidents are to report annually to the Provost on the school's and campus' assessment activities and relevant results as part of their planning process;

Time Table

To ensure that we are prepared to report to our accrediting agency, Middle States, in a timely manner:

- Deans, directors, and campus presidents are asked to submit documentation of their assessment process for each degree program as part of their annual planning documents in March 2007 and documentation of their assessment processes for general education programs as part of the annual planning document in March 2008;
- Initial assessments of each degree program should be conducted and results reported during Academic Year 2008; initial assessments of general education programs should be conducted and results reported during AY 2009.