

Student Academic Achievement and Degree Program Outcomes

The University of Arkansas program for the assessment of student academic achievement in degree programs is based on principles first approved unanimously by the Campus Faculty in 1993 and approved by the Commission on Higher Education of the North Central Association in 1995. It is consistent with the U of A mission goal of “*strengthening academic quality and reputation by enhancing and developing programs of excellence in teaching, learning, research, and outreach,*” and the institutional responsibility for evaluating academic quality and the ways and extent to which educational goals are being achieved in academic programs. This program has been governed by Academic Policy 1630.10 since 1998 from which time annual reports on assessment of student academic achievement have been required from colleges and schools.

During the fall semester of 2006, the provost and deans called for a review of assessment of student learning in college degree programs (by individual major) through the academic departments in which the programs are housed. The reviews focused on assuring that assessment was in place and on achievement of degree program outcomes. Generally, the reviews were made in the context of standards and goals for comparable programs in peer institutions and statements promulgated by respected professional associations in the discipline and included such topics as: 1. What are the student learning outcomes for each degree program and how are they appropriate to the U of A mission and the degree programs? 2. What evidence is available that students achieve the stated learning outcomes? (What indirect and direct measures of student learning are utilized?) 3. In what ways is evidence of student learning analyzed and used? 4. How is effectiveness of assessment evaluated and improved?

Following on from the 2006-2007 review, the U of A campus assessment policy as annotated (attached) will continue to be implemented, but, beginning in 2008-2009, with a new reporting format and schedule developed to provide for variety among disciplines and less frequent periodic central reporting on assessment results to complement program review and accreditation results. Programs of study such as free-standing minors and certificates (those in areas of study in which there is no major/degree program) should be included in the assessment and the report. The first formal assessment of the (whole) general education core curriculum will also be included.

Campus Policy item 6 requires another assessment of students three to five years after the students graduate. During 2008-2009, institutional support and management for a broad initiative to survey graduates on a periodic basis will be sought.

Note that Campus Policy items 7, 8, and 9, provide for 1) unit and 2) school and college committees charged with evaluating results and effectiveness of the assessment programs and reporting findings, conclusions, and recommendations; and 3) deans’ approvals of unit plans for assessment. Individual schools and colleges have the responsibility for implementing processes appropriate to their circumstances for compliance with these requirements.

The review and approval of unit programs of assessment by the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs is addressed in the section on *Documenting Student Achievement*. The reporting format and schedule are attached. The assessment reports in the new format, *Documenting Student Achievement*, will continue to be considered, along with other indicators of program quality, including the findings from the program review process, as budget and other resource needs are considered and as organizational options for change of other kinds are evaluated.

Campus Policy, 1993; Annotated 2008

Assessment of Student Academic Achievement in Degree Programs

1. *Each unit will devise its own plan, which will be consistent with these campus criteria and procedures.*
2. *Each plan will identify the specific goals which the unit has established for students earning degrees under its auspices. The following questions will be addressed by all units:*
 - a. *What are we attempting to do for our students?* [That is, what are the main or core learning outcomes for each of our degree programs: what are the things students are intended to know and be able to do when they graduate?]
 - b. *How well are we doing what we are attempting?* [What evidence are we collecting of the extent to which students are achieving the learning outcomes?]
 - c. *What might be modified to make it better?* [What inferences can be drawn from the evidence of student learning and the level of learning to illuminate changes needed in the curriculum or the way it is offered to better promote the learning we intend our students to achieve?]
3. *Each plan will require that undergraduate students in the unit be assessed during students' last year before graduation.* [As at least two assessment techniques are required, one or more may be used during the students' last year before graduation and others may be used earlier if desired.]
4. *Each plan for undergraduate students will require that assessment include use of at least two of the following techniques:*
 - a. *a standardized examination (GRE, LSAT, MCAT, BAR, etc.);*
 - b. *a comprehensive or exit examination for student majors created and graded by faculty in the assessing unit;*
 - c. *exit interviews with all graduating students;*
 - d. *a specific project appropriate for use in assessment of artistic performance, architectural or engineering project, research paper, etc.);*
 - e. *a senior seminar or capstone course appropriate for use in assessment;*
 - f. *an internship of clinical experience which has been approved by the department's faculty as appropriate for use in assessment;*
 - g. *student portfolio appropriate for use in assessment.*

[It is noted that only c. is an indirect measure. Other direct or indirect techniques may be utilized if found better to achieve comparable results. For example with b, identifying the key elements of an exit exam and embedding them in final exams for required courses may achieve better results than free-standing comprehensive or exit exams in which students may have less incentive to perform well. Additional measures as well as substitute measures may also be used.]
5. *Plans for graduate or professional students will require assessment, late in the students' programs, by at least two of the above techniques.*
6. *Each plan will require that another assessment of students be made no sooner than three, and no later than five, years after the students graduate. This assessment will be in the form of a questionnaire or interview and will concentrate on how effective the work at the University has been in preparing the student for his or her career.* [An institutional initiative to survey graduates periodically is being sought.]
7. *Each plan will require that, on an annual basis, a committee of faculty from each unit evaluate the results of that year's assessment of students and alumni. The committee will report its findings and conclusions to the unit's faculty, including recommendations (if any) concerning changes in the curriculum, teaching assignments, and other aspects of the program.*

8. *Each unit plan will be adopted by the faculty and chairperson of that unit and approved by the Dean of the College or School and by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. [Now Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs]*
9. *Each College or School will establish a committee charged with periodically evaluating and reporting on the effectiveness of the assessment plans of its units.*

Campus Faculty action of April 27, 1993

Note: A provision for separate assessments of the General Education Core approved in 1993 was superseded by Arkansas Law and Policy which identified state-wide requirements for the *Arkansas Assessment of General Education* and use of the CAAP examination or another exam with results comparable among schools in Arkansas in 1994. In 2007, the CAAP examination was discontinued by legislation. In 2007, the campus was required by the Higher Learning Commission to develop and implement an assessment process for the Common Core Curriculum and report to the HLC on its effectiveness by June 30 of 2010. Core faculty engaged in that process will report their first assessment results to the Provost by June 30, 2009 in a report to include revised learning outcomes for the core, techniques for evaluation, and results. This report will be routed through deans of units where core courses are offered, the General Education Core Curriculum Committee, and the Director of Assessment.

Documenting Student Achievement

The first *Documenting Student Achievement* report (the revised assessment report format) from each academic unit will be due June 30, 2009. Subsequent reports will be due on the same date in odd numbered years. Each report will be routed through the Dean(s) and Director of Program Review and Assessment (for their review) to the Provost.

Report Contents:

- A succinct and explicit statement of the unit's current program for assessing student learning must be appended to the report. The program design must be consistent with the attached, annotated Campus Policy and, in particular, must include identification of each of the key learning outcomes for each program and the techniques or process for assessing students' level of achievement of that outcome.
- The academic unit report will be organized by degree program (major or freestanding minor or certificate), with a section for each program offered. Each such section of the report will have the following common elements, although additional material may be included (at the end) as desired by the unit:
 1. Name of the degree program.
 2. Learning outcomes for the degree program (typically 4 to 8) and, for each, the techniques or process by which level of achievement of the outcome is determined. Include a statement on strategy and methodology of sampling and assessing.
 3. Results of assessment of level of achievement of the program learning outcomes by students close to the end of the degree program.
 4. Analysis of the results (conclusions drawn from results).
 5. Changes to degree program made or planned on the basis of results, if any.
 6. Changes to assessment process made or planned on the basis of process, if any.

Following receipt of the reports and analysis by the Director of Program Review and Assessment, the Provost will identify those units whose current assessment programs are approved and those who have approval pending specified changes or additions.

The campus report format and schedule may be revised following the analysis of the first year's reports and in light of recommendations and comments made by participants.