

University Leadership Council
National Best Practice Report



Assessing Student Learning Outcomes
Best Practices for Engaging the Faculty



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Assessing Student Learning Outcomes
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About the Education Advisory Board



The Firm

Since 1979, The Advisory Board Company has been providing best practice research to the world's leading hospitals, academic medical centers, and health systems. With a staff of over 900 in Washington, D.C., we serve health care CEOs, administrators, and clinical leaders at 2,700 institutions, publishing 55 major studies and 10,000 customized research briefs yearly on progressive management practices. The work focuses on the industry's best (and worst) demonstrated practices, helping member institutions benefit from one another's hard-learned lessons.

A New Practice in Higher Education

Encouraged by academic medical centers that our model and experience serving nonprofit institutions might prove valuable to universities, the Advisory Board began a higher education practice in 2007, with memberships serving the provost (the University Leadership Council), student affairs (the Student Affairs Leadership Council), and business and finance executives (the University Business Executive Roundtable). In our first year, we have been honored to welcome over 150 of the nation's leading universities on whose advice and goodwill we rely.

A Member-Led Agenda

Provosts set the agenda for the University Leadership Council's research. Each year, we poll the membership to better understand their "up-at-night" issues—topics of genuine aspiration or urgency. The most widely voiced issues become the focus of our best practice work. In our first year, members prioritized increasing faculty diversity, developing institutional strategy for student learning outcomes, and managing multidisciplinary research centers.

Casting the Net Wide

Our search for innovative practice is not limited to the membership. The Advisory Board believes it serves members best by exposing them to ideas and practices beyond the narrow confines of their peer groups as traditionally defined. We scan the entirety of the higher education sector for effective and replicable models, typically reviewing thousands of pages of literature and interviewing hundreds of institutions to find the 10 to 15 top ideas worthy of provosts' attention.

Specializing in Best Practice Inquiry, Not Policy Analysis

New to the higher education community, we are acutely aware of how much we have to learn and modest in our ambitions in serving the provost. Our work is not intended to propose national policy (or to lobby policy makers), nor is it peer-reviewed academic research. Our narrower intention is to distill the empirical experiences of institutions like yours, profiling success stories (and failure paths) to help prioritize investments and improve performance. At our best, we offer original insight into "what's working" in higher education and critique the popular wisdom and fad-like trends that take hold in all fields and industries.

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Top Lessons from the Study

“Rightsizing” Institutional Strategy for Measuring and Communicating Student Learning Outcomes

- #1 Higher education’s attention to student learning outcomes is undeniably rising; Spellings Commission recommendations, the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), increasingly consequential accreditation actions, and a perceived shift in the court of peer opinion are causing even flagship state universities and selective privates to revisit outcomes assessment practices
- #2 Most provosts describe their challenge as one of “rightsizing” institutional strategy—designing processes that are responsive to the evolving expectations of external stakeholders but conservative of resources and realistic in time and expertise demands on faculty
- #3 Additionally, provosts want to transcend the campaign mentality that has characterized past assessment efforts, implementing a process viewed by faculty as sufficiently legitimate and unobtrusive so as to be self-sustaining over time

Calibrating Concerns: Will Learning Outcomes Become a Meaningful Accountability Measure?

- #4 The first task for provosts in devising institutional policy on outcomes assessment is understanding how far and how fast key external stakeholders might go in promoting inter-institutional standards for measuring student learning
- #5 ***Nothing Immediate or Compulsory:*** The signal finding from our inquiry is that no external constituency is likely to impose standards on individual institutions in the foreseeable future; concerns about a “No Undergraduate Left Behind” system for higher education are unfounded, and learning outcomes are still a long way from really mattering as an accountability metric or quality indicator
- #6 ***No Interest at Federal Level:*** Department of Education involvement in higher ed outcomes is surpassingly unlikely; Spellings-era discussions of linking funding to standardized tests found little traction, and the August 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act explicitly denies the Secretary of Education the power to establish criteria for assessing “any institution’s success with respect to student achievement”
- #7 ***States Offering Only Token Incentives:*** Only a handful of states measure student learning (typically through state-mandated standardized test scores) alongside familiar success metrics like retention and graduation rates in appropriations formulas; even the most “aggressive” states are putting less than 0.5 percent of total funding at risk, too small an incentive to catalyze ambitious redesign of legacy assessment practices
- #8 ***Peer Consortia Still in Pilot Mode:*** NASULGC’s VSA was created in 2007 in direct response to Spellings report calls for greater transparency and comparability; participants are required to administer and report scores from one of three standardized general education tests as proxy of student learning “value-added” within four years
- #9 Although more than half of land-grant institutions have joined the VSA as of this writing, few have implemented the controversial testing component, and participants reserve the right to opt out of the consortium at any time (and thus need not disclose scores publicly)
- #10 ***Little “Consumerist” Momentum:*** Students and families continue to use the traditional criteria of course offerings, job placement, reputation, and cost to inform school choice; little evidence exists of either pent-up demand for “value-added” metrics or the typical student’s ability to interpret outcomes data even if it were available

A Different Story with Regional Accreditors

- #11 Regional accrediting agencies are the primary external constituency placing sustained emphasis on outcomes assessment; accreditors' more demanding standards for assessing outcomes (introduced five or more years earlier) are now being experienced firsthand at a critical mass of four-year institutions, with more frequent and consequential sanctions for insufficient practice
- #12 For most universities, the downside risk of a stay-the-course posture toward assessment is in prolonged distraction from regional accreditation; many institutions interviewed by the Council have been forced to compress years' worth of assessment process-building effort into a few months following site visits gone wrong

Quantifying Where Accreditors Are Asking for More Sophisticated Assessment Practice

- #13 After hearing repeatedly voiced frustration with the perceived lack of clarity about accreditor expectations for outcomes assessment, the Council attempted to taxonomize the guidance site visit teams are giving universities on evolving assessment capabilities
- #14 The Council obtained recent accreditor site visits at 60 four-year universities, analyzing the documents for specific mentions of outcomes assessment, seeking patterns in the type and frequency of recommendations; while this approach is no one's idea of a statistically valid sample, it provides some useful directionally correct insight into where accreditors perceive current university practice to be insufficient, suggesting a baseline standard toward which the provost should concentrate scarce financial and political resources
- #15 Three main categories of outcomes assessment "action items" emerge from the accreditor site visits:
- #16 ***Incomplete Documentation:*** 20 percent of site visit team recommendations address threshold matters of documentation; universities simply have not defined learning outcomes for all departments or general education objectives and are unable to aggregate evidence of assessment activity in time for the visit
- #17 ***Overreliance on Indirect Assessment Methodology:*** 40 percent of recommendations address overreliance on indirect assessment methods (grades and student surveys) and the absence of preferred direct methodologies such as rubrics, assessment items embedded in course assignments, and peer-reviewed demonstration models
- #18 ***Assessment Disconnected from Institutional Practice:*** 40 percent of recommendations fault universities for failing to use assessment data to meaningfully inform core activities such as curricular improvement, program review, budgeting and strategic planning; accreditors are signaling that institutions' historical tendency to present columns of assessment data next to lists of teaching improvements with no cause-and-effect between the two will prompt undesirable follow-up actions

Top Lessons from the Study (cont.)

The Uphill Struggle for Faculty Mindshare

- #19 For most institutions, the threshold challenge for meeting any of the newer accreditation standards is engaging faculty; the widely voiced provost goal of “getting faculty to own assessment” faces many philosophical and practical obstacles
- #20 *No Legitimacy:* At most institutions, a vocal minority of faculty fairly or unfairly perceives assessment as a fundamentally illegitimate, bureaucratic exercise with questionable pedagogical value
- #21 *No Time:* Faculty open to assessment in principle often lack basic skills (in writing a learning outcome, incorporating events into coursework, etc.) and the time to learn them; faculty are quick to observe that the opportunity costs of assessment involve not only time spent reviewing student work but also the time needed to learn how to do (and document) assessment in the first place
- #22 *No Incentive:* Few universities are incorporating assessment data in regular, consequential, campuswide curriculum or resource allocation decisions, reinforcing the perception that assessment efforts serve purposes of external entities over internal quality
- #23 *Resistance at Both Ends of the Experience Curve:* Many institutions are reporting coalitions of the unwilling in which departments with no experience or interest in assessment (“we don’t want to assess”) and departments already doing sophisticated assessment for external professional certification (“we don’t want to re-assess”) are equally unsupportive of institution-wide assessment initiatives
- #24 *The Lose-Lose Prognosis for Assessment-as-Campaign:* A failure path evident from the research is an institutional posture treating assessment as a campaign, rallying department chairs and faculty for a convulsive effort around accreditation visits; once urgency around accreditation passes and charismatic assessment advocates leave their posts, assessment efforts abate, faculty become desensitized to further exhortations to own assessment, and previous sunk investments in assessment leave institution in no better position to accommodate shorter accreditation cycles

Successful Assessment Programs Sustain Faculty Engagement by Generating Useful Data with Modest Demands on Faculty Time and Expertise

- #25 *The Good News:* In 150+ interviews, the Council encountered a number of universities with assessment regimens scalable even to the largest research institutions without unrealistic demands on faculty
- #26 Collectively, the practices parse the assessment cycle into component parts, involving the faculty only where absolutely essential (defining outcomes, interpreting results, selecting an appropriate methodology) using assessment data to inform pedagogical and budget requests) while reducing administrative burdens through creative uses of IT and administrative divisions of labor

Making Assessment Easier: Balancing Standardization and Autonomy

- #27 Several universities are investing in (fairly inexpensive) information management tools and central support roles enabling faculty to generate accreditation-ready assessment documentation without imposing a top-down methodology
- #28 *Practice #1: Online Accreditation Report Builder:* Georgia Tech has designed an intranet-based self-service tool that allows departments with existing assessment plans to cut and paste them into a standard format for accreditation and provides departments with minimal or no plans with just-in-time tutorials explaining unfamiliar terminology and suggesting models for writing and measuring learning outcomes

- #29 Georgia Tech's report builder is an open-source application that any institution may download and use free of charge; other institutions that have adopted the tool report achieving the accreditation gold standard of getting all departments to accreditation-ready assessment plans in less than one year
- #30 **Practice #2: Reusable Assessment Tools Database:** Recognizing the quantity of high-quality assessment already being done on campus, Carnegie Mellon University funded a task force charged with inventorying the best assessment practices across seven colleges and loading them onto a searchable database containing explanations of methodology, implementation guidelines, and contact details of on-campus experts
- #31 This practice reduces both time and expertise burdens by allowing faculty to browse efficiently among a range of pre-vetted assessment methodologies, efficiently identifying models meeting pedagogical preferences and administrative constraints
- #32 The Council recommends both the Georgia Tech Online Accreditation Report Builder and the Carnegie Mellon Assessment Tools Database as the tools the provost would need to provide in order to achieve the goal of having all departments with accreditation-ready assessment plans within two to three years; brown-bag lunches, assessment teach-ins will not suffice

Scaling Direct Assessment of Student Work

- #33 The second challenge in engaging faculty is reducing the labor intensity of so-called "direct" assessment; regional accreditors are insisting that universities complement traditional indirect measures of student learning (grades, surveys) with direct evaluation of student competency, preferably from classroom artifacts
- #34 **Obstacle:** direct assessment approaches force the trade-off between faculty acceptance and faculty effort; low-effort direct measures like standardized tests or student-constructed e-portfolios require little faculty time, but face validity concerns
- #35 In contrast, peer-reviewed student performances and rubrics applied by assessment committees to actual course assignments are highly valid but require time commitments infeasible for most universities
- #36 **Practice #3: Course Assignment Outcomes Coding:** Fairfield University is one of a handful of institutions breaking this compromise by "outcome-izing" the growing portion of course assignments submitted online; faculty tag parts of individual assignments as being associated with various departmental and general education learning outcomes, allowing assessment teams to aggregate rich and varied samples of actual student work for assessment without further faculty effort
- #37 Universities should consider using their next online course management system upgrade or changeover as an occasion to introduce direct tagging of course assignments to permit sophisticated sample aggregation of student artifacts

Making Assessment Count: Embedding Outcomes in Consequential Decisions

- #38 Reducing faculty time burdens is only half the equation in sustaining faculty engagement over the long term; assessment activities must also be meaningfully integrated into curricular and budgetary decisions, both to pass accreditation muster and to sustain faculty engagement with assessment

Top Lessons from the Study (cont.)

Incenting General Education Reform

- #39 For many universities, the highest-profile set of institutional decisions closely involving outcomes assessment surrounds efforts to revitalize the general education curriculum
- #40 Institutions already embarking on planned modernization of core curriculum for the new century or trying to improve student success metrics in introductory courses are using these existing initiatives as an occasion to deploy assessment processes for general education objectives
- #41 *A Governance Challenge:* Members are reporting that implementing an assessment program for general education objectives is perhaps the most difficult of the newer accreditation requirements to meet; as difficult as the process is at departmental level, it is more so for the institution as a whole
- #42 This “white-space” issue is often landing on provost’s desk by default, as few institutions have a governance process for the potentially contentious process of defining such criteria; the Council encountered many universities that “gave up” after fractious, unproductive efforts to define institutional outcomes

Focusing Incentives on Early-Career Faculty and Under-Performing Courses

- #43 Pursuing a strategy appropriate for institutions with large enrollments or mandates to increase access, the University of Alabama has focused on redesigning high-enrollment introductory courses with low student success rates into “learner-centric” courses featuring assessment hallmarks of objective standards of student competency attainment, documentation of student learning over time, and collective grading rubrics shared across course sections
- #44 *Practice #4: Junior Faculty Course Redesign Bonuses:* The University of Alabama College of Arts and Sciences offers a \$1,000 incentive to early-career faculty to participate in a training program on learner-centric outcomes and teaching methods; the program’s capstone assignment is an actual redesign proposal for a class the participant teaches, to be implemented the following semester
- #45 The focus on junior faculty is not an implication that many later-career faculty do not care deeply about teaching and assessment; instead it is an effort to deploy scarce training funds on next generation, with longer careers over which to leverage new skills
- #46 *Practice #5: Tenure Review Assessment Dossiers:* Tenure-track faculty are required to provide an institutional assessment officer with an annual report on their assessment activities that details how they have modified their courses in response to assessment data; the level of engagement with assessment is a criterion in the teaching section of tenure review letters
- #47 Assessment is not considered a decisive or even a major tenure criterion, but the signal value of the process strongly reinforces student learning-centric cultural focus
- #48 Alabama’s focus is on early-career faculty and redesigning large intro courses is expected to help the institution migrate to an assessment culture over time; in seven years, a significant percentage of faculty will have graduated from assessment workshops, and learner-centric courses will comprise a significant portion of general education curriculum and touch large percentage of students without an expensive and contentious top-down gen ed overhaul

Avoiding Turf Wars and Dividing Labor in Institution-Wide General Education Redesign

- #49 The Council found several instances of universities using planned core curriculum revision as an occasion to define gen ed outcomes and introduce assessment processes; the challenge here is structuring the governance process to minimize turf wars and prevent “death by committee”
- #50 **Practice #6: General Education Eligibility Recertification:** University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill conducts an extensive climate survey culminating in articulation of new “21st-century” general education objectives; satellite committees define criteria under which individual courses qualify as addressing new objectives, and instructors who teach general education courses must reapply for gen ed status, mapping syllabi to specific gen ed objectives
- #51 This approach intelligently divides the daunting work of re-mapping the general education curriculum to new objectives, providing an incentive for faculty to revise courses where needed and map them to general education objectives; this mapping permits a much more sophisticated longitudinal assessment of both student accomplishment and the availability and effectiveness of the general education curriculum

The Final Frontier—Evidence-Based Funding

- #52 Several institutions highly dedicated to creating a “culture of evidence” are explicitly incorporating assessment data into the most consequential resource allocation decisions
- #53 **Practice #7: Outcomes-Centric Budgeting:** The College of William and Mary is implementing an online budget request template for the institution’s annual planning process requiring departments to denominate funding requests in terms of specific, measurable learning objectives; requesters are encouraged to attach assessment data substantiating the need for funds and required to propose learning outcomes metrics for evaluating investment’s out-year impact
- #54 Over time, the provost expects a more disciplined resource allocation process, as monitoring the degree to which hoped-for outcomes were achieved surfaces the most reliable stewards of resources, demonstrable best pedagogical practices worthy of replication across departments, and opportunities for investing in teaching and learning shared services
- #55 **Practice #8: Outcomes-Centric Fundraising Prioritization:** Widener University has elegantly combined institutional strategic planning, accreditation, learning assessment activities, and fundraising prioritization, converging traditionally siloed planning activities into a single document that can be repurposed for communications with trustees, faculty, and accreditors; reductions in redundant administrative documentation frees up university leadership time to actually operationalize long-term goals
- #56 Learning outcomes assessment data is one conspicuous input in compiling the fundraising table of needs; assessment data is matched against institutional teaching priorities to inform development campaign priorities
- #57 Anecdotal evidence suggests this rigorous approach, quantifying why need exists and how progress is to be assessed, makes a more compelling case to potential donors and is resulting in increased gifts



Calibrating the Provost's Concerns

*"Rightsizing" Institutional Strategy for
Measuring Student Learning Outcomes*

Provosts' Rising (if Often Reluctant) Interest in Learning Outcomes

Two years of fallout from the Spellings Commission report, concerns of increasing accreditor scrutiny, and a general perception of a shift in the court of peer opinion have prompted leaders at many universities to personally investigate the state of practice of student learning outcomes assessment in higher education.

Rising interest in assessment of learning outcomes has been reflected in the record attendance and seniority at conferences devoted to learning outcomes measurement across 2007–2008. (Fig. 1.1)

The number and nature of voluntary peer groups that have organized to compare practice and strategize on institutional approaches to measuring and communicating student learning also indicate the increased interest in assessment across the country.

(Fig. 1.2) Flagship publics and selective privates, perceived as the institutions with the poorest track record or least philosophical support for outcomes assessment, have devoted special attention to the issue in the last year. The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) made headlines by chartering the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) in November 2007. A response to the Spellings Commission's calls for improved comparability of institutional information, the VSA includes measures of student general education competency in the form of standardized test scores. (See more on early intelligence on the VSA below.)

In the first quarter of 2008 the Council on the Financing of Higher Education (COFHE) chartered

Assessment Working Groups at Flagship Publics and Prestigious Privates

Fig. 1.2



Voluntary System of Accountability approved, November 2007



Learning outcomes is lead topic at winter 2007 provost meeting



Learning outcomes dominates conversation at spring 2008 provost meeting

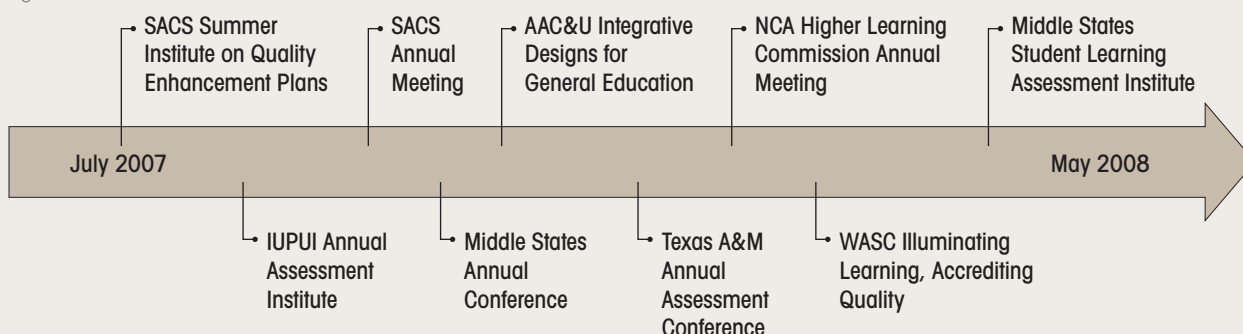
Source: National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges Board of Directors. "NASULGC & AASCU Formally Invite Colleges & Universities to Participate in the College Portrait: VSA Initiative." National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. <http://www.nasulgc.org/NetCommunity>; University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

a working group on learning outcomes practice, and even the Ivy Plus group devoted the majority of its first provost meeting in 2008 to the subject.

While many provosts interviewed by the Council are personally enthusiastic about the value of assessment, the majority expressed more interest in ensuring that their institutions remained "within the accepted standard." They conducted fact-finding at conferences and peer meetings in order to calibrate where that standard is moving.

Record Seniority and Attendance on Assessment Conference Circuit

Fig. 1.1



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Provosts Adequately Served on Assessment Basics

With so much discussion occurring at conferences, the Council asked our member institutions how we might engage the topic of student learning outcomes assessment and provide new information. What we heard from members was that they did not want a primer on assessment basics. Provosts told us they are already adequately served regarding basic information on assessment theory and practice (the sort of information found in assessment handbooks) and did not need any more advice from experts on how to “outcome-ize” a syllabus. We heard curiosity (but not necessarily urgent interest) around innovative assessment techniques such as senior capstone courses and performance models. Provosts also reported that they already had an adequate understanding of how the assessment cycle worked. In summary, provosts in the membership feel either that they have a good grasp on all assessment basics or that they do not need to learn what they do not know because someone in their assessment office already has that knowledge.

Admirable, but Not Me

If the interest was not in assessment theory, we then asked “What about practice?” In this case, provosts’ answer was a qualified “no.” Though interested in

practices from other universities, provosts were less interested in in-depth profiles of the assessment exemplars typically cited at assessment conferences circuit. The response we heard was “Those schools are admirable...but not me.”

Three schools frequently mentioned as assessment exemplars are featured here. (Fig. 1.3) Alverno College, a small Milwaukee-based liberal arts women’s college, is well-known for its extensive use of portfolios and demonstration models. Alverno does not use letter grades; instead it evaluates student performance through a combination of self-assessments and detailed evaluations by faculty. The entire Alverno faculty is engaged in assessment of every student, every year. For most provosts we interviewed, the Alverno model was simply too inclusive to scale to a larger campus.

Truman State, on the other hand, is known for closely and regularly measuring multiple dimensions of the institution’s performance. Truman State utilizes 10 annual standardized tests, capstones, and e-portfolios to measure various constituencies across campus, both students and faculty. The data collected from this measurement is compiled into an annual assessment report made up of three volumes of information. Internal reporting activities require an estimated 25 percent of the provost’s budget at Truman State. For most universities this investment would be simply too expensive.

Impressive—But Hard to Translate to Research Universities

Fig. 1.3



Alverno College

- Milwaukee-based liberal arts women’s college
- Extensive use of e-portfolios, demonstration models
- Entire faculty engaged in assessment review, all students assessed

Too Inclusive



Truman State University

- Missouri-based public masters’ university
- Rigorous multi-modal assessment; ten standardized tests, capstones, e-portfolios
- Three-volume annual assessment report

Too Expensive



University of Phoenix

- Leader in online higher ed; largest university in country
- Course-level capture of student learning
- Frequent curriculum redesign based on employer/alumni input

Too Utilitarian

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Finally, the University of Phoenix has attempted to brand itself as an assessment exemplar as part of its avowal to engage in frequent curriculum redesign based on employer and alumni feedback. For most institutions, this model is simply too utilitarian—bordering on corporate training—as well as too reliant on online delivery.

While the efforts of each of these institutions are admirable, their approaches to assessment do not align well with the needs and resources of the average four-year university.

Rightsizing Institutional Outcomes Strategy

To understand how we could best serve the membership in the area of outcomes assessment, the Council asked provosts to be more specific about their level of engagement with the issue. We found the voice we were searching for in Dr. Bruce Mallory, provost of the University of New Hampshire, who crystallized the collective university zeitgeist around student learning outcomes. In Dr. Mallory's words, most provosts know that the status quo is too little—that they are likely to lag behind peers and even invite difficulties in their next reaccreditation round if they continue to do the same things they have always done to assess student

How Much, How Fast?

"Until I know how sophisticated assessment needs to be, I don't know how much to invest or what organizational changes are required. We want to engage in assessment in good faith—we just want to do it without bankrupting the school."

Dr. Bruce Mallory
Provost
University of New Hampshire

learning. At the same time, provosts are wary of overinvesting in assessment—of allowing assessment efforts to eclipse rather than support institutional priorities. According to Dr. Mallory, what provosts need are signposts for estimating what the right size of investment in student learning outcomes assessment should be for their institution.

The key question that Dr. Mallory posed to us, and which many other provosts echoed was, "To which external constituency should I optimize?" The Council engaged six questions to answer this question, which we will address in turn. (Fig. 1.4)

To Which Constituency Should We Optimize?

Fig. 1.4

	Federal #1) Will there be a national accountability standard for learning outcomes?
	State #2) Will state appropriations be tied to outcomes assessment?
	Peer Consortia #3) What new outcomes data will my peers be disclosing?
	Students/Families #4) Will outcomes factor into school rankings?
	Accreditors #5) What outcomes assessment capabilities will regional accrediting bodies require?
	Faculty #6) What is appropriate and realistic to ask of faculty?

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

#1: Will There Be a National Accountability Standard for Learning Outcomes?

“No Undergrad Left Behind” Surpassingly Unlikely

With regard to the federal-level question “Will there be a ‘No Undergrad Left Behind’?”—Council research suggests this scenario is surpassingly unlikely. In practice, the Spellings Commission Report’s more controversial recommendations have actually received very little traction. For instance, Charles Miller, chair of the Spellings Commission, quickened the pulse of university leaders across the country in the fall of 2005 by speculating that it would be useful to link federal aid eligibility to some form of standardized testing, employing the basic architecture of No Child Left Behind in higher education. The ensuing outcry from various stakeholders in higher education and Congress must have given the commission pause. When the Spellings Commission Report was published in the fall of 2006, the recommendation to link federal funding with testing was conspicuously absent.

In the winter of 2006 Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings tried a different tack, calling for potential Department of Education oversight of the assessment standards for reaccreditation. However, the College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2008 (the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act passed by Congress in late July 2008 and signed into law by President Bush in August) explicitly denies the Secretary of Education the authority to establish criteria for assessing “any institution’s success with respect to student achievement.”

In summary, despite the general alarm sparked by the Spellings Commission Report, those recommendations that would have meant the most disturbing potential scenarios for university leaders—tying federal aid eligibility to testing or mandating federal agency oversight of how colleges measure student learning—have not come to fruition, nor will they in the foreseeable future.

#2: Will State Appropriations Be Tied to Outcomes Assessment?

Even Most Aggressive States Putting Little at Risk

Another area of concern voiced by provosts is to what extent states might consider student learning outcomes data as part of their higher education appropriations formulas. After conducting a survey of all 50 states’ funding formulas, the Council found that only a few states had explicitly listed anything related to measures of student learning as a line item in their appropriations formulas. Of that small group, even the most aggressive states are putting very little at risk.

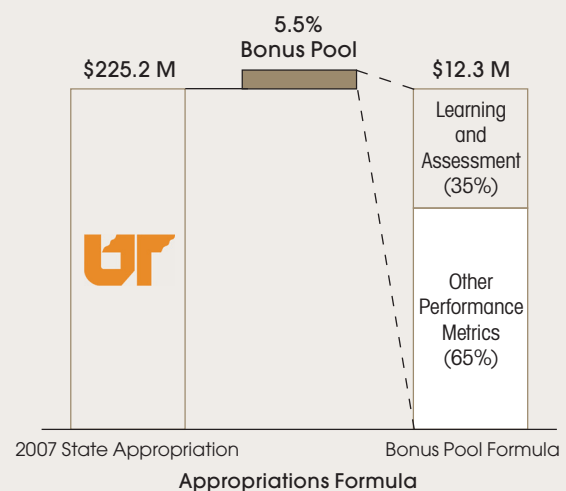
The state the Council encountered linking the most funding to student learning data is Tennessee, but even Tennessee’s formula offers little ultimate incentive. Money is tied to institutional performance only in the form of a bonus, and only 35 percent of that bonus pool is connected to student learning outcomes assessment.

In Tennessee’s performance-funding model, the state’s colleges and universities can earn up to 5.5 percent of

Modest Bonus Pool

Fig. 1.5

University of Tennessee, Knoxville’s
Bonus Appropriations Formula



Source: Tennessee Higher Education Commission.
“Performance Funding, 2005-10 Cycle.” Tennessee Higher Education Commission. <http://www.tennessee.gov>.

their original state appropriation (in addition to what they are guaranteed from the state). For example, because the University of Tennessee, Knoxville received \$225.2 million in state funds in 2007, up to an additional \$12.3 million in bonus funding (or 5.5 percent of \$225.2 million) was available to the school through the bonus pool. If UT-Knoxville had maxed out on all its discrete performance metrics, the school would have received approximately \$12.3 million in extra funding from the state of Tennessee—a considerable amount, but still small in comparison to the overall state appropriation. Only \$4 million of this \$12.3 million pool, however, was linked to results on the state's chosen measure of student learning, an ETS-developed standardized test called the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress, or MAPP. (Fig. 1.5)

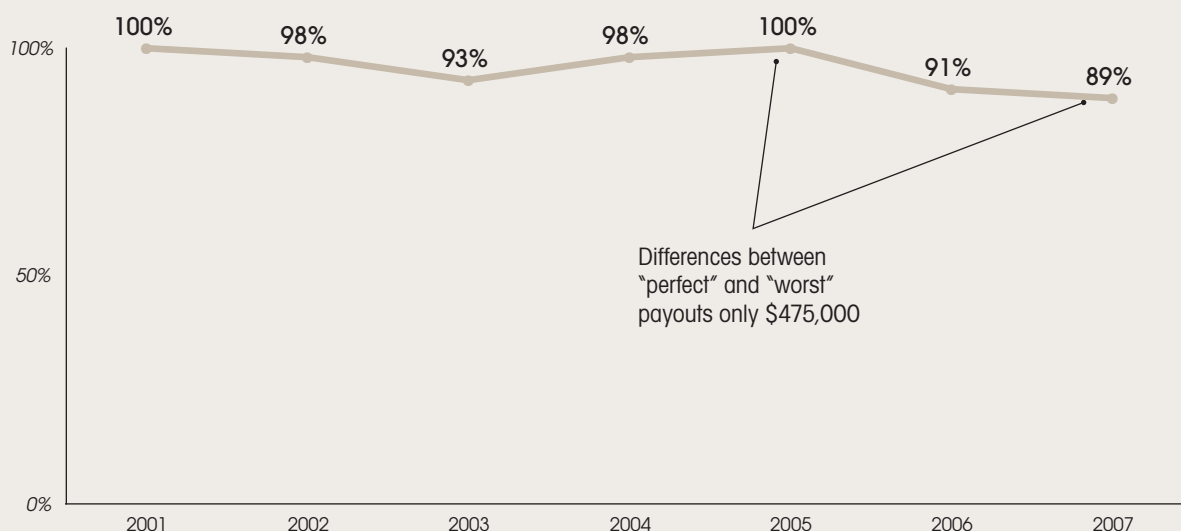
However, looking more closely at historical data for UT Knoxville's bonus pool payout from the last six years,

the Council found that far less than \$4 million actually seems to be at risk. Since the program's inception, the percentage of its bonus pool that the university has received has tended to vary only slightly from year to year. (Fig. 1.6) On two different occasions the University of Tennessee received 100 percent of its possible bonus related to student learning and assessment (in 2001 and 2005). For the school's worst performance, in 2007, the university received 89 percent of the possible bonus. This 11-percentage-point gap between perfect and worst-ever performance translates into a payout difference of only \$475,000. It is not clear how many provosts would see this sum as a sufficient incentive for making a large-scale, centralized investment in a new assessment office or information system, or for expending the political capital required to get chairs, deans, and professors to embrace a top-down assessment system.

"Sticky" Payout

Fig. 1.6

Percentage of Learning and Assessment Bonus Pool Achieved
University of Tennessee, Knoxville



Source: Tennessee Higher Education Commission. "Performance Funding, 2005-10 Cycle." Tennessee Higher Education Commission. <http://www.tennessee.gov>.

#3: *What New Outcomes Will My Peers Be Disclosing?*

Peer Consortia Still in Pilot Mode

The VSA is a voluntary consortium of state schools organized by NASULGC, in partnership with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) as a direct response to the Spellings Commission's calls for greater transparency and inter-institutional comparability. As of this writing, 250 NASULGC and AASCU member institutions have agreed to participate in the VSA, representing 58 percent of all students who attend public four-year institutions nationally.

The signal effort of the VSA is the College Portrait tool that all VSA signatory institutions must post on their websites. The College Portrait offers a standard format that allows students and families to compare institutional data. (Fig. 1.7) While the vast majority College Portrait's approximately 40 fields represent data that is already being collected and reported by the typical university (cost-to-attend, graduation rates, course offerings, etc.) there is a VSA section devoted to information on "core educational outcomes." This is the most controversial element to which VSA signatories must submit, as they are required to implement one of three standardized general education tests within one year of joining the VSA and to report on those test scores after their fourth year of VSA participation. To an extent, this reporting of "student learning gains" was the least-worst option that the VSA proponents could devise to respond to the Spellings Commission's calls for an indicator of educational value-add.

Anecdotally, we have heard that states such as Ohio, North Carolina, and New Mexico that are currently debating the use of performance funding formulas for higher education appropriations are considering adoption of VSA reporting standards. Since the VSA may be becoming the de facto standard for some states, the provosts with whom we spoke expressed interest in the current state of the VSA.

Early Feedback on CLA

Of the three standardized test options available to VSA signatories, the instrument that is garnering the most attention is the Collegiate Learning Assessment, or CLA. Developed by the RAND

Corporation, the CLA was designed specifically to measure student learning gains on high-level general education outcomes such as analytical thinking, problem solving, and written communication—areas in which higher education graduates are seen as underperforming according to recent alumni and employer surveys.

As of this writing, the CLA has been piloted by 45 doctorate-level and 91 master's-level universities. In early feedback, the test has been widely admired as an elegant instrument when compared with multiple-choice tests. Negative feedback regarding CLA implementation has focused on the predictable difficulty of incenting student participation and effort, as well as concerns that it can be exceptionally labor-intensive and costly for an institution to ensure a student sample for the CLA from which valid and reliable conclusions can be drawn.

In a survey conducted by the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) in conjunction with the CLA, CIC institutions reported the most and least effective approaches for recruiting and incenting freshmen and seniors. (Fig. 1.8) The survey found that the least effective approaches for participant recruitment were, somewhat predictably, open solicitation for volunteers. The least effective incentives for motivating student effort on the assessment were the typical practices of offering retail gift cards or cash. Though effective incentives varied for freshmen and for seniors, in general the strategies that worked best for recruiting participants tended to be those that embedded the CLA into required coursework, such a first-year seminar or senior capstone course. Approaches that linked test performance to something that students care about, from early course registration to extra graduation tickets, seemed to be most effective in incenting student effort on the CLA.

The Council is aware of several approaches being piloted to incentivize student effort on the CLA by linking test scores to desirable perquisites or embedding the CLA in actual coursework. (Fig. 1.9) At Indiana Wesleyan University, first-year students who score well on the CLA receive first access to course registration, preferred status in the housing lottery, and premium parking assignments. Texas Lutheran includes the CLA as an exam in freshmen seminars.

Data Elements from the VSA's College Portrait

Fig. 1.7

Consumer Information

Student Characteristics

- Total number of students
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Geographic distribution
- Age

Undergraduate Success and Progress Rates

- Four-year graduation rates (both FTFT and transfer students)
- Six-year graduation rates (both FTFT and transfer students)
- Retention rates

Costs

- Typical undergraduate costs per year without financial aid
- Overall financial aid awards
- Annual need-based scholarships and grants
- Annual need-based loans
- Percentage of students receiving types of financial aid

Admissions

- Class rank
- Standardized test percentiles
- Application numbers
- Admissions yield

Classroom/Faculty Characteristics

- Student-faculty ratios
- Average class size
- Faculty gender and ethnicity
- Carnegie classifications
- Housing statistics (on and off campus percentiles)
- Campus safety information
- Degrees and areas of study
- Degrees awarded
- Most common areas of study

VSA in Brief



- Voluntary System of Accountability now includes 250 NASULGC schools
- College Portrait offers standard format for students and families to compare institutional data (most already in public domain)
- Participants must implement one of three standardized general education tests within one year
- Schools must report test scores after fourth year, but can opt out of VSA at any time

Student Experiences and Perceptions

- Group learning experiences
- Active learning experiences
- Institutional commitment to student learning and success
- Student satisfaction
- Experiences with diverse groups of people and ideas
- Student interaction with faculty and staff

Student Learning Outcomes

- CAAP (ACT)
- MAPP (ETS)
- CLA (RAND)



Already Reported by Most Schools

New Pilot Tests

Source: National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges Board of Directors. "The Voluntary System of Accountability: Summary and Background Materials." National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. <https://www.nasulgc.org>; University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Small Schools' Incentives for Recruiting Students to Take the CLA

Fig. 1.8

Responses from a survey of CIC/CLA Consortium members, February 2008, based on experiences covering the prior three years

Most successful approaches for recruiting first-year students:

- Embedded CLA administration in a first-year seminar or required first-year course (50%)
- Given during new student orientation (29%)
- Targeted appeals through faculty members or other advisors (14%)
- Financial incentives (7%)

Least successful approach attempted to recruit first-year students:

- Open solicitations and appeals for volunteers

Most successful approaches for recruiting seniors:

- Embedded in a senior seminar or capstone course (43%)
- Direct appeals to seniors (with or without monetary or gift incentives) (29%)
- Targeted appeals through faculty members (14%)
- During on-campus assessment day activities (7%)
- Embedded in other upper-level classes (7%)

Least successful approaches attempted to recruit seniors:

- Open solicitations and appeals for volunteers (44%)
- Open solicitations and appeals for volunteers with monetary or gift incentives (33%)
- Monetary or gift incentives alone (22%)

Incentives offered that have been most effective with first-year students:

- Retail gift card or gift certificate (29%)
- Cash (7%)
- Class extra credit (7%)
- Did not use incentives (50%)

Incentives offered that have been most effective with seniors:

(Among those that offered incentives, 45 percent did so through a raffle or drawing.)

- Retail gift card or gift certificate (36%)
- Extra graduation tickets and/or rebates of graduation fees (21%)
- Cash (14%)
- Class extra credit (7%)
- Did not use incentives (21%)

Additional approaches used to recruit first-year and senior students:

- Personal letters from the president or dean (30%)
- Appeals from faculty members (30%)
- Classroom presentations by assessment committee members (26%)

Source: *The Council of Independent Colleges Evidence of Learning: Applying the Collegiate Learning Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning in the Liberal Arts College Experience*. Washington, DC: The Council of Independent Colleges, 2008.

Note: Due to multiple responses and rounding, items may not total 100 percent.

Both approaches serve the dual intention of motivating effort and generating a larger and presumably more representative sample of first-year students. To increase CLA exam participation among seniors, Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota, is inviting professors to use the CLA exam as part of fourth-year capstone courses. At Bethel and elsewhere, use of the CLA is entirely at the professor's discretion. Many faculty find the CLA to be an elegant exam and voluntarily incorporate it for that reason; the Council is unaware of any institution that had required faculty at any level to adopt the CLA into coursework.

Early pilots of the CLA suggest that the costs of administering the test may be larger than many had budgeted. The RAND Corporation handbook for CLA implementation estimates the cost for administering the test to 300 students (the minimum number needed, RAND states, to generate a valid sample) to be \$40,000 (\$28,000 to administer the test and \$15,000 to incentivize students to take it). This figure, however, does not include expenses relating to recruiting communications, room scheduling, IT lab compliance, and proctor training, and the complexity of administering and completing the test may add substantially to the cost of generating a valid sample.

Strategies for CLA Sampling

Fig. 1.9



Indiana Wesleyan University

Front-of-Queue Registration

- Test participants get first access to course registration, housing lottery, and premium parking space



Texas Lutheran University

Freshman Seminars

- CLA required in mandatory freshman seminars taken by all students



Bethel University

Senior Capstones

- Some professors agree to include CLA in analytic, writing-intensive capstones, offering bonus credit for participation

First-Year Strategies

Fourth-Year Strategy

Source: *The Council of Independent Colleges Evidence of Learning: Applying the Collegiate Learning Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning in the Liberal Arts College Experience*. Washington, DC: The Council of Independent Colleges, 2008.

The Council spoke with one large public university that recruited approximately 3,000 students to take the CLA via a cash incentive. Unfortunately, though, because of insufficient training for both students and proctors regarding test administration, only 75 of the completed tests were administered correctly—far too few to generate a valid sample. Other institutions echoed the difficulty inherent in producing a valid sample for the CLA, though to a lesser extent. Many Council interviewees reported that the actual cost of generating a valid sample for the CLA was three to four times what the institution had originally had budgeted, due mostly to unanticipated training costs.

In summary, universities across the country are still very much in pilot mode in their adoption of the CLA. The reports that the Council heard from a July meeting of NASULGC provosts were that only a very small portion of the 250 VSA signatories had decided

which of the three tests they would use, and indeed many universities were opting to delay the decision until 2009 in the hopes that more feedback would emerge from institutions on which to base a decision.

Insufficient to Measure Full Range of Higher-Order Outcomes

Whatever the merits of the CLA, MAPP, and CAAP, VSA participants are realizing that these assessments do not measure all the institutional education objectives cited by the typical university. Because the tests do not in themselves constitute sufficient assessment evidence for general education objectives, VSA participants still need to devise “home-grown” outcomes definitions and assessment methods for common objectives such as multiculturalism, leadership, and citizenship. (Fig. 1.10)

Learning Outcomes Assessed by MAPP, CAAP, and CLA

Fig. 1.10

Outcomes	MAPP	CAAP	CLA
Critical Thinking	✓	✓	✓
Analytical Reasoning			✓
Problem Solving			✓
Writing	✓	✓	✓
Reading	✓	✓	
Mathematics	✓	✓	
Science		✓	
Multiculturalism			
Global Citizenship			
Fine Arts/Aesthetic Appreciation			
Humanities			
Technology Literacy			
Social Sciences			
Ethics			
Health, Wellness, and Physical Activity			
Diversity			
Foreign Language			
Leadership			

Commonly cited institutional outcomes require "homegrown" methods of assessment

Source: Passmore, Benjamin, Donald Langenberg and Susan Racine Passmore. 2004. "Vague Expectations: Standards for Student Learning Outcomes Across the Spectrum of U.S. Academic Institutions." The National Governors Association; Council for Aid to Education Board of Trustees. "About the CLA Measures." Council for Aid to Education. <http://www.cae.org>; ACT, Inc. "The Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency." ACT. <http://www.act.org>; Educational Testing Service. "MAPP User's Guide." Educational Testing Service. <http://www.ets.org>.

Learning Outcomes Assessment Not on Consumers' Radar

Fig. 1.11

Student Criteria for College Choice

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|
| #1 Degree Availability in Desired Field | #3 Job Placement Record | #5 Availability of Financial Aid/Scholarships |
| #2 Courses Offered | #4 Academic Reputation | #6 Graduate School Placement |

Source: Ingels, Steven J., Michael Planty and Robert Bozick. "A Profile of the American High School Senior in 2004: A First Look." *Initial Results from the First Follow-up of the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005.

#4: Will Outcomes Factor into School Rankings?

No Consumerist Momentum for Outcomes Reporting

Could learning outcomes measurements, as imagined by the CLA, one day factor into university and college rankings? Based on Council research findings, at this time there does not appear to be sufficient consumerist momentum to spur any kind rankings based on learning outcomes.

The likelihood of students and families consulting any of the three VSA standardized test scores as a metric of educational value or inter-institutional comparison is very low. *U.S. News & World Report* indicates that there are only two scenarios in which the CLA (or any other indicator of educational value) might factor into rankings. In the first, a super-majority of institutions in the same ranking cohort would have to administer the same test in the same way for a comparable time period and disclose the scores in the same format. Such alignment seems unlikely, as current pilots are employing very different sampling methodologies and periodicities. The second development that could prompt inclusion of learning outcomes measures in the rankings would be the rise of significant “consumer demand,” whereby readers insist on such metrics. No such demand exists currently, and numerous surveys confirm that students and families continue to rely on traditional criteria such as degree availability in desired field, courses offered, and academic reputation for college selection. (Fig. 1.11)

Several provosts and assessment experts observed that even if learning outcomes data were disclosed, it is unclear if they would be perceived as intelligible to the average family or valid to higher education experts. The response to the University of Phoenix’s release of its first-ever Academic Annual Report underscores this possibility.

The topic of learning outcomes appears in all three sections of the report, which Phoenix released on June 5, 2008. Section one of the report focuses on intra-institutional improvement over time. Phoenix measured the performance of their students on a standardized test of general education skills (ETS’s “MAPP”) relative to students at other master’s universities. Phoenix’s conclusion was that, though the university’s students enter with significantly

What Do the Numbers Mean?

“I’m not sure how a parent or prospective student would interpret the type of outcomes assessment data we’re talking about. Parents care much more about how much debt their child leaves school with and whether they’ll get a good job.”

Provost
Large Research University

lower writing skills, they leave with levels comparable to those of their peers, implying that Phoenix’s educational value-add is better than what one might find at other institutions. The second section reported on measures of inter-institutional comparison. Phoenix concluded that, when risk factors for the university’s non-traditional student population are included, their students complete their degrees at rates much higher than the national norm. Finally, in the third section, Phoenix lists a series of recent investments that the school has made in teaching and curriculum that purportedly have been informed by data from various internal assessments of student learning. (Fig. 1.12)

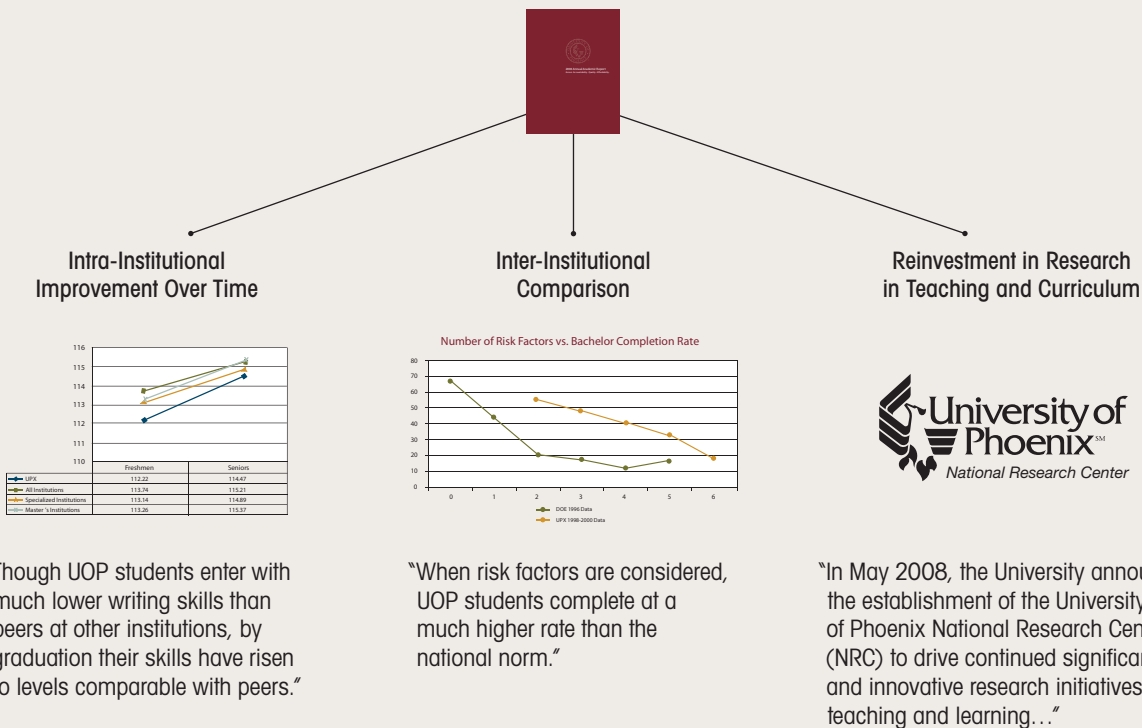
The University of Phoenix’s efforts might seem like assessment in its most principled form: defining their own standards; measuring student achievement over time, both with internal and external reference; and then using the data collected to inform future investments in teaching and curriculum. Like any institution might, Phoenix sheds the best light on its student learning statistics in their annual report. Reaction to the annual report, however, was mixed. Print and blogosphere responses to the assertions in the report question both the value added-methodology and the interpretation of the results.

Higher Education a Long Way from Outcomes Really Matter

Another sign that learning outcomes measurements are unlikely to factor strongly in university rankings in the foreseeable future is the example of efforts to measure and improve clinical quality outcomes in the health care sector. The University Leadership Council’s

University of Phoenix Annual Academic Report, June 5, 2008

Fig. 1.12



Source: University of Phoenix, Inc. "2008 Annual Academic Report." University of Phoenix. <http://www.phoenix.edu/academicannualreport>; Redder, Elizabeth. "Inflated Assessment by Phoenix?" *Inside Higher Ed*, June 6, 2008.

parent organization, The Advisory Board Company, maintains an extensive health care practice serving CEOs, senior administrators, and clinical leaders at more than 2,800 of the nation's leading hospitals and health systems. In two decades serving this sector, the topic of how health care clinical quality should be measured, communicated to the public, and rewarded by financing bodies has periodically risen atop our research agenda.

Mixed Response

"These are really different populations...It gives kind of a false impression to suggest that [Phoenix] should somehow be credited with the improvement...What they presented in the report was PR, and not very clever."

Trace Urdan, Analyst
Signal Hill

Since 1991, a number of influential studies by the most credible research organizations have shown that failure to observe known, best clinical practice standards is resulting in alarming numbers of preventable errors. (Fig. 1.13) Dr. Robert Brook of the RAND Corporation famously wrote in 1993 that "hospital admissions represent the number one cause of preventable death in the United States."

During these years, federal and many state governments explored linking reimbursement to clinical quality measures, and many sector futurists predicted that managed care organizations would begin aggressively directing customers to providers scoring highest on a growing list of nationally recognized quality indicators. Hospitals, in response, periodically endeavored to self-organize consortia to define standards, using much the same language as higher education is today: "We need to set standards before they're set for us."

These predictions never found traction. No public or voluntary consortium has ever been able to achieve the critical mass of adoption (or consumer awareness) necessary to meaningfully inflect hospital practice. By 2006, the federal government had reached the point only of linking reimbursement bonuses to hospitals' provision of data on 10 extremely broad quality indicators (not how well they were performing on these indicators), and in 2007 an Advisory Board study calculated that less than 2 percent of health care payments were at risk for any type of quality or outcome result. This is astonishingly slow progress considering the clear human cost of failure to observe best clinical practice, and the tremendous financial cost to the nation in hospital spending; Medicare spending on hospitals, at approximately \$400 billion, is nearly 24 times the federal funds devoted to Pell Grants.

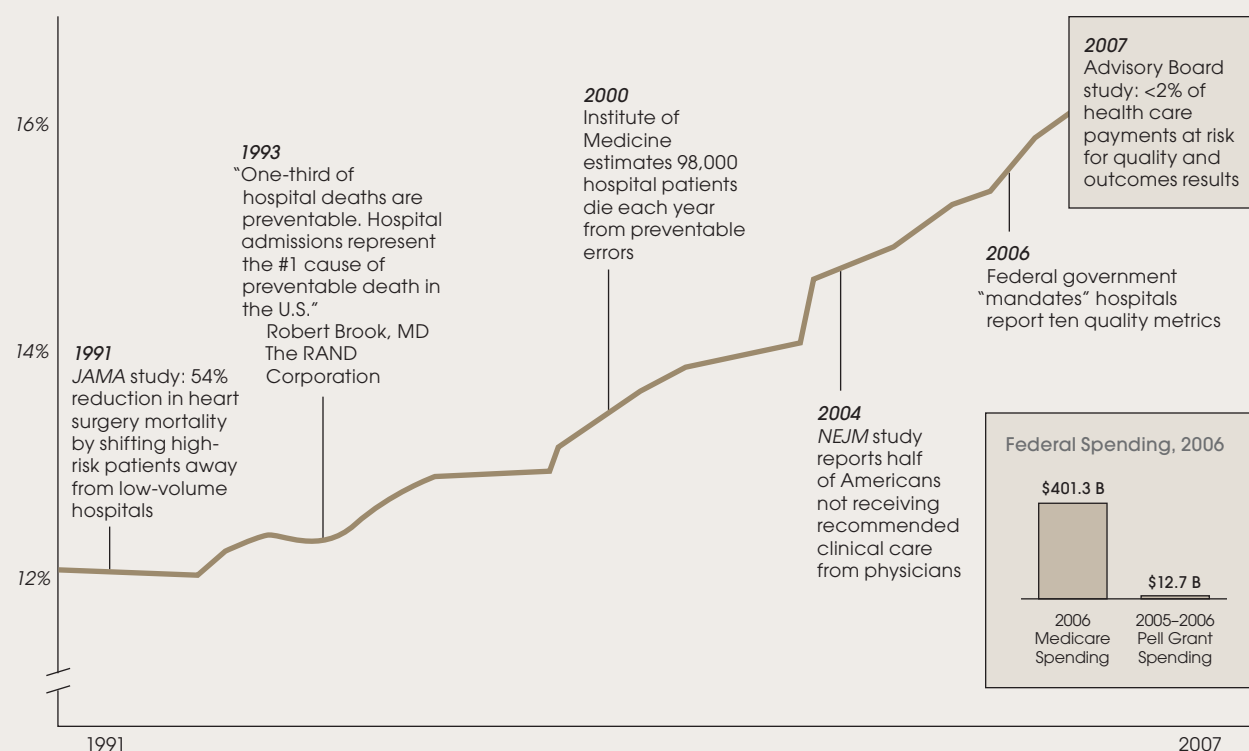
Health care might fairly be described as in an emergency. By contrast, higher education, despite widespread and legitimate concerns about rising costs, is a relatively effective system: students and families are generally satisfied with the returns on their investment in a degree, *U.S. News* rankings (as flawed as they may be) are functioning as a quality indicator, and the absolute amounts being spent to subsidize higher education are comparatively small.

Health care's lesson is not that investment in continuous quality improvement is not worthwhile; many institutions have organized cultures expressly around data-driven systems to define and evolve "best" clinical practice. Instead, health care teaches the daunting difficulty of promulgating quality standards of any sort regionally or nationally. For these reasons,

America's Health Care Industry—Deadly, Costly and Still Largely Unaccountable

Fig. 1.13

Health Care Spending as Percentage of GDP, 1991—2007



Source: The Cardiology Working Group. "Cardiology and the Quality of Medical Practice." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 265 (1991): 483; The Advisory Board Company. *In the Line of Fire*. Washington, D.C.: The Advisory Board Company, 1993; Committee on Quality of Health Care in America. *To Err Is Human*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2000; McGlynn, Elisabeth A., et al. "The Quality of Health Care Delivered in the United States." *The New England Journal of Medicine* 348 (2003): 2635–2645; University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

the Council believes it will be a long time before learning outcomes are normalized across colleges and universities and that, as in health care, investments

in continuous quality improvement will be pursued at the institutional level, congruent with individual pedagogical values—"quality for its own sake."

#5: What Outcomes Assessment Capabilities Will Regional Accrediting Bodies Require?

Vague Expectations

While federal regulators, state legislatures, and consumers are making few consequential demands on universities to evolve learning outcomes assessment, the same cannot be said of regional accreditors, who, in the words of one assessment expert interviewed by the Council, "are prepared to make life increasingly troublesome for schools they perceive to be stonewalling about assessment."

In our interviews, the Council encountered widespread frustration about the perceived lack of clarity on re-accreditation expectations regarding learning outcomes. While accreditors note that their requirements for assessing outcomes are not new (the six regional bodies introduced new outcomes

policies between three and eight years ago), the bulk of universities are experiencing their first site visits using these standards, and many are finding them unhelpfully unspecific. Accreditors counter that excessively prescriptive assessment requirements might create a de facto standard that would constrain the variety of education missions and evaluation methods, but many university administrators still worry that misinterpreted standards may result in large investments and marshalling of faculty time while leaving the institution open to accreditation re-work.

(Fig. 1.14, 1.15, 1.16)

Regardless of the side of the debate on which one falls, almost everyone can agree that accreditation cycles are becoming more frequent and requiring longer lead times. While a decade ago one year of

Disconnects Between Accreditors and Institutions on Clarity of Outcomes Expectations

Fig. 1.14

Representative Accreditor Remarks

"We've been requiring student learning assessment for a very long time. The standards should be ineluctably clear by now."

President,
Regional Accreditor

Representative University Reactions

"I'm outraged. [The accrediting bodies] are not only moving the goalposts, they're turning off the lights and making us kick in the dark."

Vice Provost, Prestigious Private
Preparing Site Visit Materials

"Our goal is to preserve institutional autonomy. We want to avoid creating a de facto standard by being too descriptive in our requirements."

President,
Regional Accreditor

"We're going to spend countless dollars assessing learning, only to be told that we're missing some crucial element. The standards don't have to be perfectly clear, but at least give me something to work with."

Director of IR, Public Ivy
Following Site Visit Report

Source: University Leadership Council interviews.

Summarizing Regional Accreditation Standards

Fig. 1.15

	Measure Institutional Educational Objectives	Measure General Education Objectives	Measure Course Objectives	Measure Program Objectives	Use Assessment Data to Effect Change
Middle States 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
North Central 	✓			✓	✓
New England 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northwest 	✓			✓	✓
Southern 	✓	✓		✓	✓
Western 	✓			✓	✓

At least five years required to collect and act on assessment data

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Links to Accreditation Standards

Fig. 1.16



<http://www.msche.org/publications.asp>



http://www.ncahlc.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=113



<http://cihe.neasc.org/>



<http://www.nwccu.org/index.htm>



<http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp>



<http://www.wascsenior.org/wasc/>

preparation may have bought institutions nine years of peace on the accreditation front, we are seeing increased signals from the six regional accrediting bodies that they intend to make accreditation much more of a continuous feedback process. (Fig. 1.17) WASC has shortened its reaccreditation cycle from ten to seven years; Middle States is planning on doing check-ins—particularly around learning outcomes assessment data—on a five-year basis. While many universities may have had success (or at least near-misses) in the past by having an “all-hands-on-deck” moment at the last minute to assemble accreditation documentation, this strategy is not likely to work in the future. The realistic stakes of the assessment debate are not related to the dreadful specter of a “No Child Left Behind” for higher education but rather the lower-stakes problem of the continuous low-grade aggregation and administrative burdens necessitated by having to meet unclear accreditor standards for student learning assessment.

In addition to anecdotal evidence of the increasing severity of accreditation follow-up actions regarding learning outcomes, the end of 2007 brought a more concrete example of this phenomenon through the example of Texas Tech. University administrators across the country sat up and took notice when SACS placed Texas Tech on probation after two years and several attempts by the university to bring its learning assessment practices up to SACS standards. Assessment experts are interpreting Texas Tech as a “shot across the bow” signaling accreditors’ resolve to sanction institutions for repeatedly failing to address learning outcomes assessment requirements.

The root cause of Texas Tech’s problem was unclear administrative ownership for defining and deploying general education outcomes. After Texas Tech’s initial site visit in 2005, SACS cited the university for failure to define, measure, analyze, and use general education learning outcomes. Texas Tech made two efforts to remedy this issue, but both attempts fell short of accreditor expectations. SACS found Texas Tech’s 2006 follow-up report insufficient because, though Texas Tech had defined general education learning outcomes, the university had not selected measures or collected and analyzed data. In a second follow-up attempt to

No More Downtime

“In the past, reaccreditation was one year of preparation that bought us nine years of peace. Now, it takes almost five years to measure and gather everything that is required to ‘close the loop,’ and the moment that you’re done with one reaccreditation cycle, the next visit team is at the door.”

Director of Assessment,
Prestigious Private University

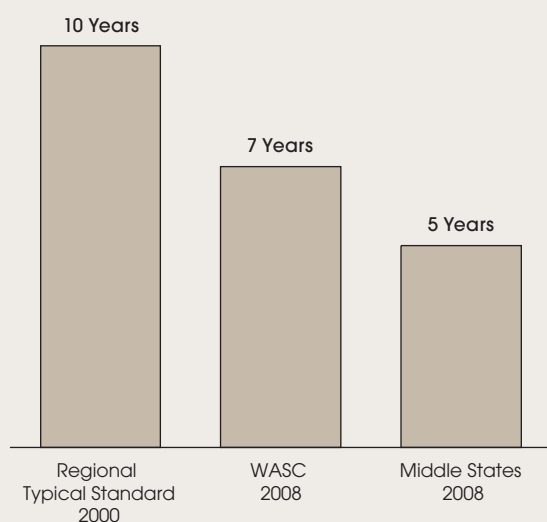
satisfy SACS, Texas Tech surveyed students across the university about what they had learned. SACS again deemed Tech’s efforts insufficient, this time because the survey relied on an indirect, rather than direct, assessment methodology.

After this second effort, SACS took the highly visible step of placing Texas Tech on probation, prompting a letter from the president to alumni and the community assuring that the university’s education standards remained high and unimpaired, and that every effort would be made in 2008 to implement a sophisticated accreditation-worthy assessment process. The provost was placed in personal charge of this effort.

For most universities, the downside risk for schools that adopt a “stay-the-course” posture toward assessment is the prospect of being forced to compress five years’ worth of assessment work into one semester. For Texas Tech, the effort to respond successfully to its probationary status has meant forming a 16-member strategic planning council, auditing 10 years of assessment data for replicable practice, hosting assessment workshops across campus, building an assessment support website, and enlisting 90 faculty members in the redesign of curriculum and assessment for general education—all in a matter of months. (Fig. 1.18) The “mass distraction” involved in implementing many years’ worth of assessment work in a dramatically compressed time frame is perhaps the greatest risk for schools who fail to evolve their assessment processes.

Higher Education Reaccreditation Cycles

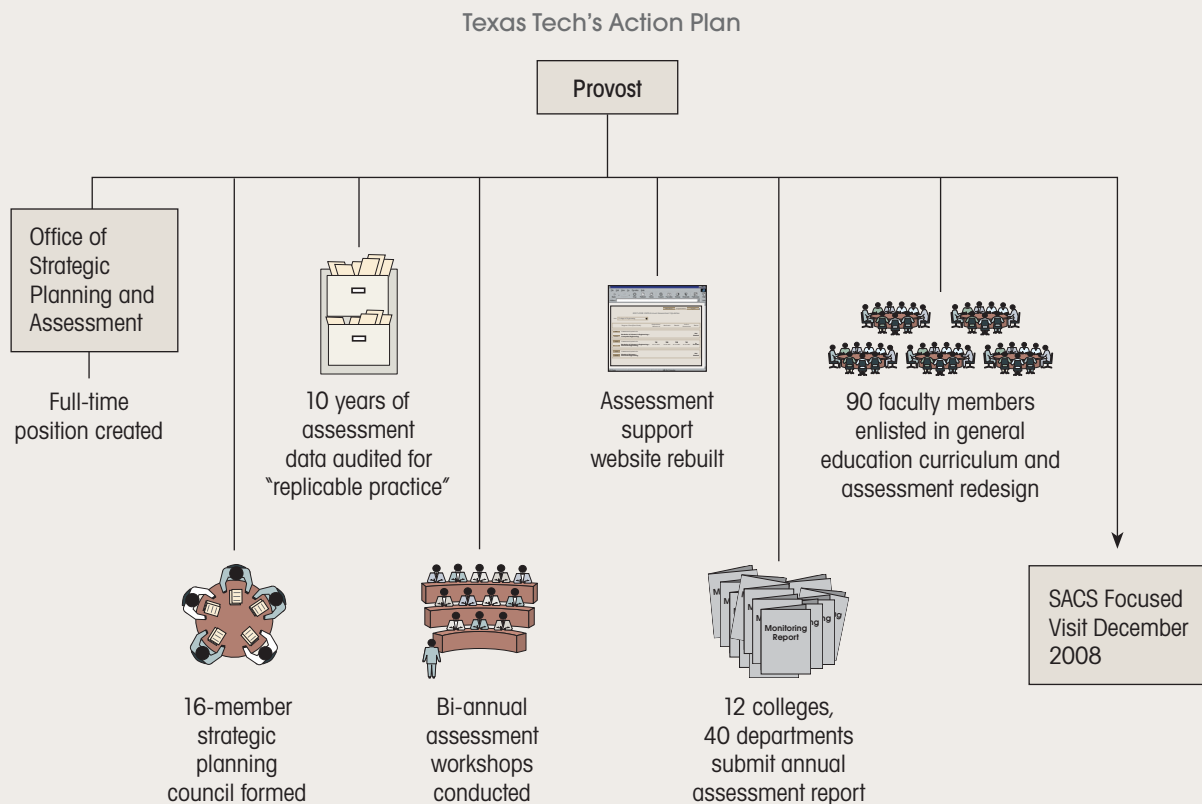
Fig. 1.17



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Texas Tech Response to Accreditation Probation

Fig. 1.18



Source: Hartz, Marlene, "Letters Warned of Tech Accreditation Trouble," *Lubbock Online*, February 23, 2008; University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

How Are Accreditors Guiding Institutions to Evolve Outcomes Assessment?

Given that regional accreditors are the stakeholder most likely to pay sustained attention to learning outcomes, the Council endeavored to quantify the types of corrective actions related to learning outcomes requested in recent reaccreditation site visits.

Regrettably, such an effort proved difficult. Most of the six regional accreditors do not aggregate results of site visits with individual institutions, and none make records publicly available. Likewise, institutions are not required to disclose site visit team feedback and often understandably are cautious in publishing direct site team critiques out of context.

Believing a clearer understanding of what kinds of assessment shortcomings invite prolonged accreditation

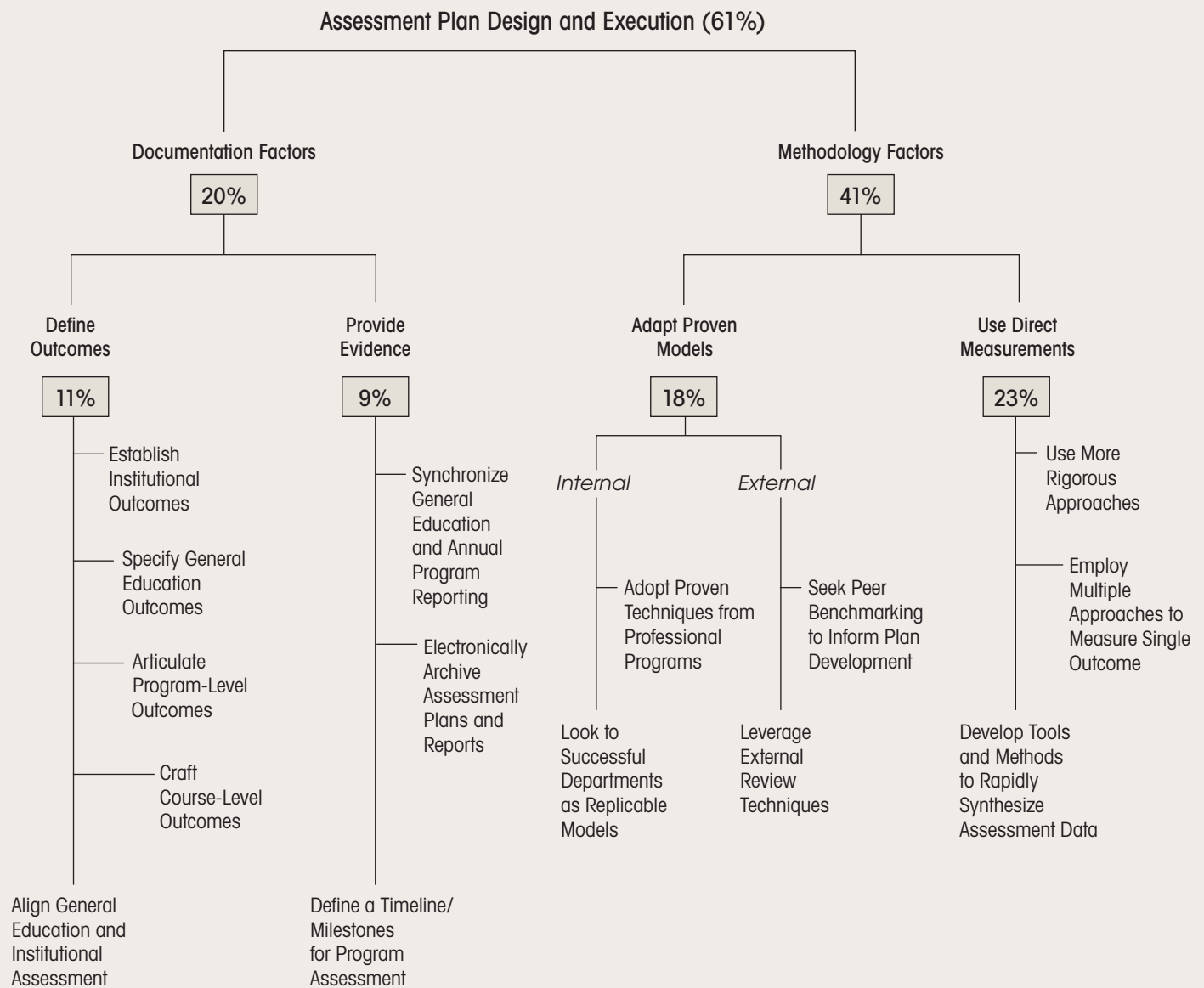
distraction to be critical in triaging assessment investments, the Council devoted several months to compiling and analyzing site visit reports from four-year universities completed since 2001. We obtained a sample of 60 reports. Most came from universities that had published them on their official websites; many were volunteered by member institutions following research interviews.

Council analysts reviewed each report, cataloging every discrete mention of outcomes assessment practice in the site visit team's own words. (Fig. 1.19) The 60 reports contained 136 discrete "points of guidance" on how the institution should consider improving assessment. The Council categorized these discrete points of guidance into the root-cause tree seen on the following two pages, grouping accreditor comments by type and frequency of mention.

Thicket of Action Items for Improving Learning Outcomes Assessment

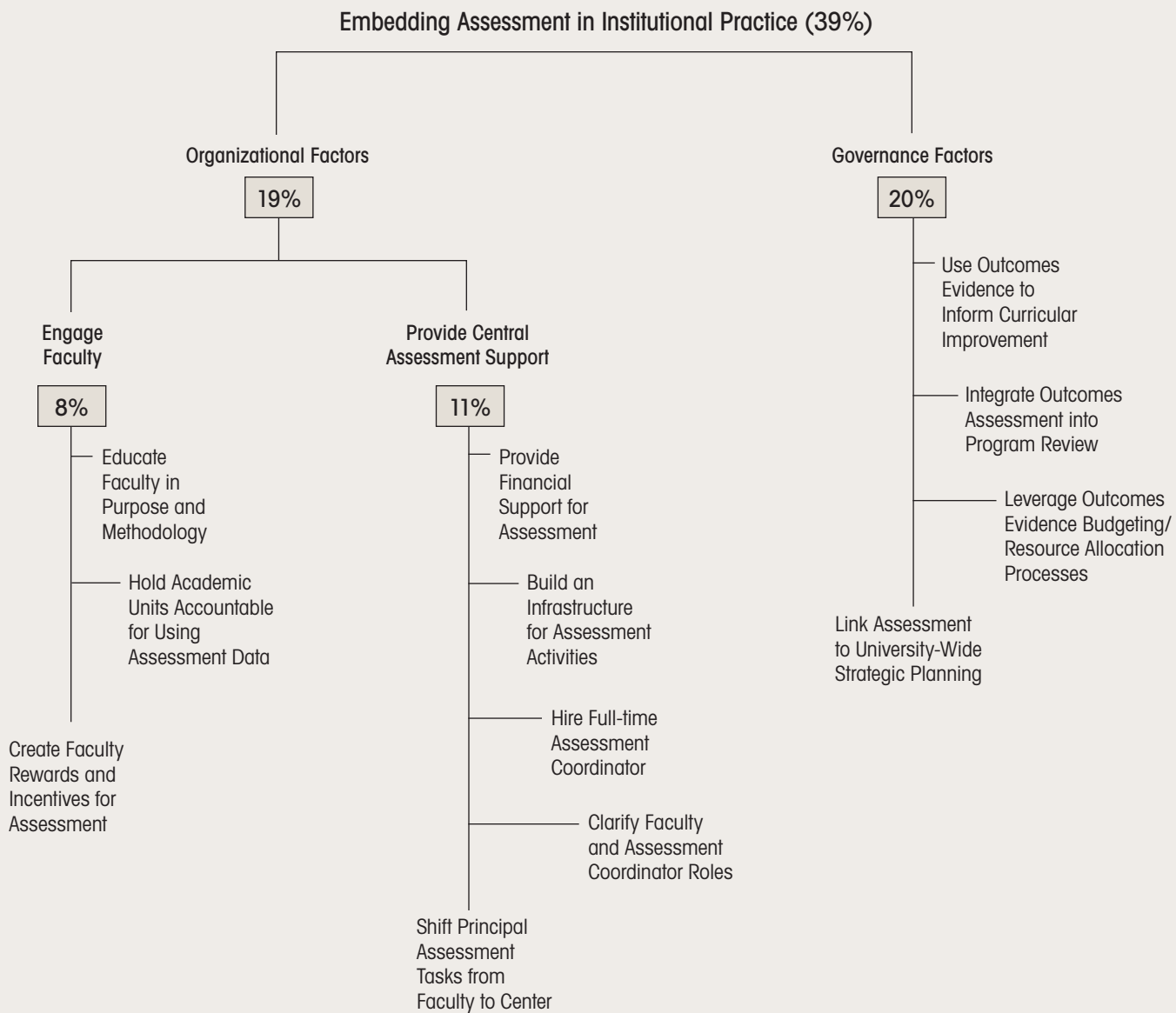
Fig. 1.19

Accreditor Site Visit Guidance by Type and Frequency of Occurrence



Note: Percentages indicate frequency of occurrence in a sample of 136 reviewer comments on outcomes assessment across accreditation reports.

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.



Visit Reports by Region

Site visit reports used in the analysis came from schools in the following accreditation regions:

Middle States: 6	NEASC: 6	SACS: 8
NCA: 25	NWCCU: 4	WASC: 11

This approach meets no one's definition of statistical validity. The sample is skewed by overrepresentation in one accreditation region (the North Central Association) and includes site visits only from schools willing to volunteer results. Most importantly, our analysis does not attempt "severity adjustment" of accreditor guidance; we are able to estimate only the frequency of mention, not the consequences in terms of follow-up visits or additional institutional effort required for compliance.

Nonetheless, the consistency of guidance across regions and institutional types suggests that the analysis offers a directionally accurate picture of where accreditors are asking universities to upgrade institutional capabilities in learning outcomes assessment and a due-diligence template of sorts for schools facing imminent accreditation visits. If the university is sanctioned for outcomes assessment, at least let it not be on the grounds of any of the predictable reasons outlined below.

Three main categories of outcomes assessment "action items" emerge from the accreditor site visits:

Incomplete Documentation: 20 percent of site visit team recommendations address threshold matters of documentation. Universities simply haven't defined learning outcomes for all departments or general education objectives and are unable to aggregate evidence of assessment activity in time for the visit.

Overreliance on Indirect Assessment Methodology: Approximately 40 percent of recommendations address overreliance on indirect assessment methods (grades and student surveys) and the absence of preferred direct methodologies such as rubrics, assessment items embedded in course assignments, and peer-reviewed demonstration models.

Assessment Disconnected from Institutional Practice: Approximately 40 percent of recommendations fault universities for failing to use assessment data to meaningfully inform core activities such as curricular improvement, program review, budgeting and strategic planning. Accreditors are signaling that institutions' historical tendency to present columns of assessment data next to lists of teaching improvements with no cause-and-effect between the two will prompt follow-up actions.

#6: What Is Appropriate and Realistic to Ask of Faculty?

Faculty Have to Own Outcomes Assessment

The sentiment that the Council heard voiced almost universally from the many provosts and assessment staff members with whom we spoke was the desire to have faculty own outcomes assessment. We also heard that, oftentimes, achieving this goal is an uphill struggle for administrators. (Fig. 1.20)

On the typical campus there are three different faculty constituencies that can frustrate attempts to embed assessment practice in everyday institutional processes. First, there is a subset of faculty for whom assessment has no legitimacy—they do not agree with the data, and they do not even agree with the philosophical premise of encroaching on faculty sovereignty within the classroom. These faculty members believe professors are paid to teach and that their departments are paid to review the quality of teaching, while grades represent everything that the assessment lobby might want.

Second, there are faculty members who accept the legitimacy of assessment in principle but need a

significant amount of training before they can carry out assessment activities effectively. One midsize land grant institution we studied reported that during a faculty colloquium on assessment practice, only a third of the faculty members in attendance knew how to write an outcome. Even if faculty are willing to contemplate assessment, very few actually know how to go about it.

Third, there are faculty who strongly oppose assessment work because of the time required to execute it. While accreditors might say that assessment done right will require that the typical PI to spend only one day per year away from the lab, for many research faculty one day away from their work is a very substantial request. We heard from the director of undergraduate studies at a large private university that he would face faculty insurrection were he to ask all of his institution's PIs to spend one day away from the lab for the purpose of assessment. Though the Council heard time and again that faculty need to own outcomes assessment, we also heard that getting faculty to own it can be a very difficult proposition indeed.

The Uphill Struggle for Faculty Share of Mind

Fig. 1.20

No Legitimacy

"Outcomes-assessment practices...are grotesque, unintentional parodies of social science and 'accountability'...run by bloodless bureaucrats...who don't understand the holistic nature of a good college education."

Large Private University
Chairperson of Fine Arts Department
Outcomes Assessment Committee

No Expertise

"We held a meeting of 79 faculty about assessment, and only two dozen knew how to write an outcome. The hard part isn't just finding the time to do assessment, but the time to learn how to do it in the first place."

Midsize Land Grant University
Associate Professor,
Business School

No Time

"The accreditors said it would only cost the typical PI one day per year away from the lab to participate in assessment activities. If they don't realize what a big ask that is for research faculty, they're really out of touch."

Large Private University
Director of Undergraduate Studies

Source: Glenn, David, "Accreditors Advise Students to Make Better Use of Student-Learning Data," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 27, 2008; University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Because it is difficult to sustain faculty ownership of assessment over long periods of time, many of the institutions that we studied reported that getting assessment for reaccreditation done via a campaign mentality on campus is a certain path to failure.

(Fig. 1.21) When assessment is being accomplished via a campaign, approximately two years prior to an accreditation site visit the provost or someone in the academic affairs office will declare "reaccreditation mode," spurring a flurry of assessment teach-ins and the development of an inventory of redundant and noncompliant plans—all resulting in last-minute, post-hoc documentation of pedagogical improvements.

If reaccreditation goes well, faculty and staff will then go back to their day jobs: deans will stop emphasizing assessment, the data that was gathered will stay on the shelf rather than be embedded in decisions of consequence, and department assessment leaders will move on to different roles. By five years after the

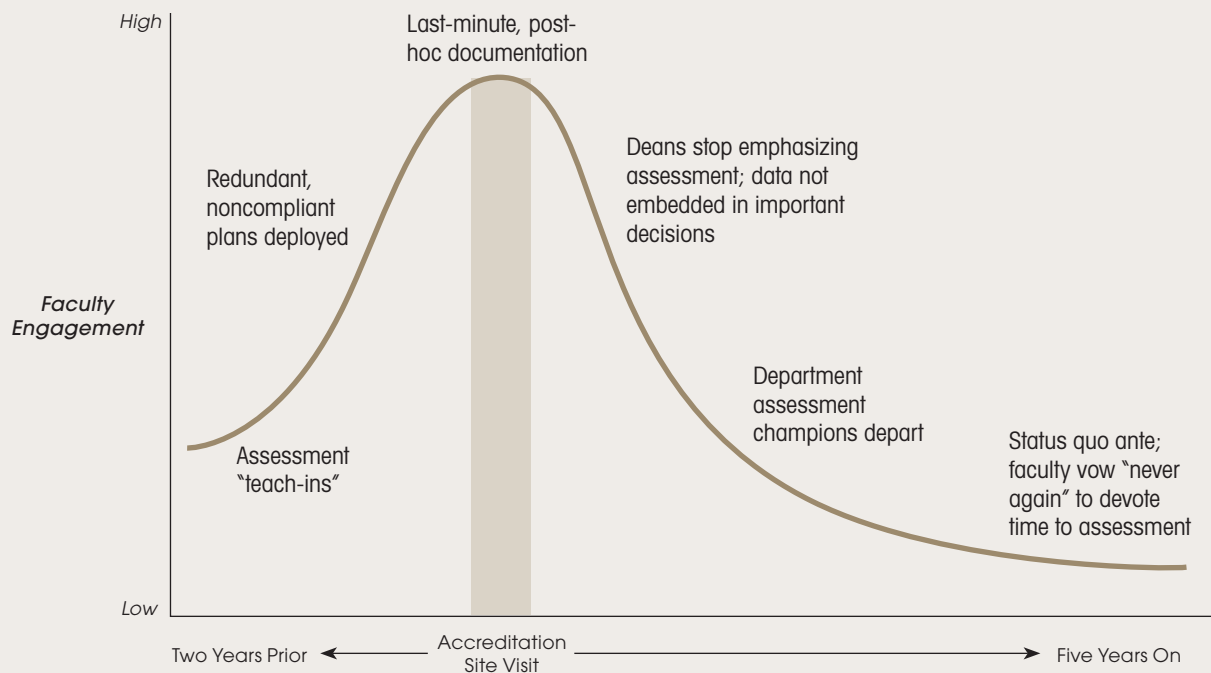
campaign, the level of faculty engagement will be back to either status quo ante or it will be even worse than it had been previously. Faculty may vow "never again" to be fooled and be even less likely than before to participate in assessment activities.

Given what "owning" outcomes assessment might mean, it does seem legitimate for faculty to push back in response to the number and variety of component steps involved in outcomes assessment (from defining outcomes to acting on findings, and everything in between). (Fig. 1.22) In many cases, these activities involve sustained levels of expertise and authority that cannot readily be assumed by regular plenary faculty participation, and asking for "all faculty hands on deck" to manage these various steps results in the predictable fate mentioned previously.

In the Council's view, the culture of assessment to which many schools sincerely aspire is unlikely to be realized if all faculty are involved in each of

The Predictable Fate of “Assessment-as-Campaign”

Fig. 1.21



Source: University Research Council research and analysis.

assessments' component steps. There is simply too much to do; the work requires too much time. The good news, though, is that after conducting over 150 interviews, the Council did find a number of four-year, research-intensive institutions with replicable assessment regimens that allow for low-cost compliance with accreditation standards without putting unrealistic demands on faculty.

The practices we found at innovative schools parse the assessment cycle into its component parts, involving the faculty at large only where absolutely essential—defining outcomes, approving methodology, and interpreting and acting on findings—while reducing administrative burdens through the creative use of new technology, administrative divisions of labor, and incentives.

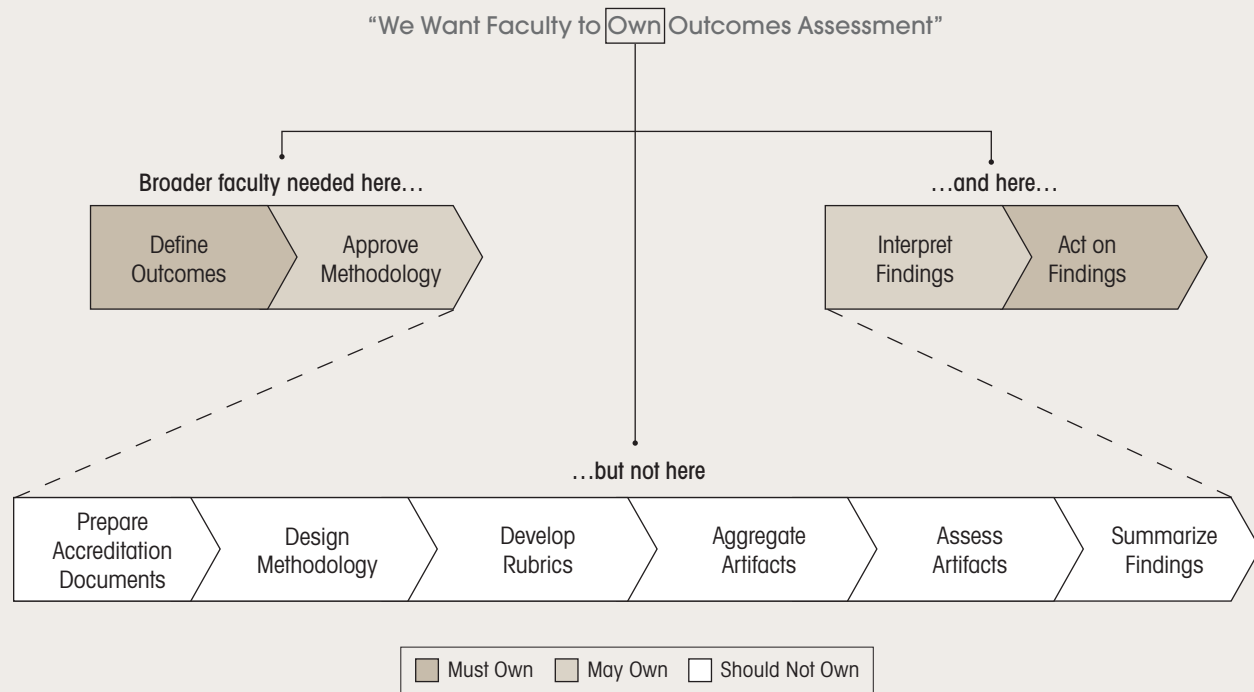


Advisory Board View

- Progressive institutions teach that faculty can “own” assessment without performing every component step
- New technologies, task specialization, and incentives make sustained faculty engagement conceivable

Deploying Faculty Only Where Indispensable

Fig. 1.22



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.



Sustaining Faculty Engagement in Outcomes Assessment

Best Practices

Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

Best Practices for Engaging the Faculty

Reducing Time and Expertise Burdens

Make It Easier

I

Balancing Autonomy and Standardization

Departments realize efficiencies in accreditation-related assessment reporting through online repository of standardized and reusable assessment plans

- #1 Online Accreditation Report Builder
- #2 Reusable Assessment Tools Database

II

Scaling Direct Assessment of Student Work

Departments break cost-quality compromise by coding electronic student coursework for easy sample aggregation and sophisticated assessment

- #3 Course Assignment Outcomes Coding

*Profiled
Institutions*



Georgia Institute
of Technology



University of
Connecticut

University of
Connecticut

Carnegie Mellon

Carnegie Mellon
University



Fairfield
UNIVERSITY

Fairfield
University

Embedding Outcomes in Consequential Decisions

Make It Count

III

Incenting General Education Reform

University uses direct and indirect incentives to catalyze comprehensive mapping of general education curriculum to learning outcomes

- #4 Junior Faculty Course Redesign Bonuses
- #5 Tenure Review Assessment Dossiers
- #6 General Education Eligibility Recertification

IV

Evidence-Based Funding

University requires assessment evidence as predicate for departments to justify funding requests for teaching and learning improvements

- #7 Outcomes-Centric Budgeting
- #8 Outcomes-Centric Fundraising Prioritization



University of
Alabama



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

University of North
Carolina-Chapel Hill



The College of
William & Mary



Widener
University

Widener
University



I. Balancing Autonomy and Standardization

Departments realize efficiencies in accreditation-related assessment reporting through online repository of standardized and reusable assessment plans

#1 Online Accreditation Report Builder

#2 Reusable Assessment Tools Database

Balancing Autonomy and Standardization

In the course of the Council's conversations with provosts and assessment officers about the challenges of managing assessment activities across departments, many interviewees mentioned the need to balance autonomy and standardization. While administrators had no interest in intruding upon the sovereignty of the classroom, they recognized that their institution would benefit from a repeatable and

"templatized" learning assessment process, if for no other reason than to meet accreditation bars. The challenge for many administrators we spoke with was how to balance these two potentially competing needs to meet the documentation requirements of accreditors. The first two practices we profile serve to achieve this difficult balance.

Practice #1: Online Accreditation Report Builder, Georgia Institute of Technology

Faculty Resistance from Both Ends of the Experience Curve

When the Council asked administrators about the challenge of getting faculty to agree on a standardized institution-wide assessment methodology, we heard that they were meeting faculty resistance from both ends of the experience curve. The survey that one midsize public university in the West conducted illustrates this challenge.

After conducting a discipline-by-discipline inventory of each department's status in terms of learning outcomes assessment, the university found faculty resistance both in those programs that historically have had very little experience in assessing learning outcomes and in those that have been assessing student learning outcomes for years. (Fig. 2.1) Approximately 20 percent of departments, including many in the liberal arts disciplines, reported that they weren't interested in assessing student learning outcomes at all. These departments either lacked consensus for defining the outcomes of their field of study or were philosophically opposed to assessment in general. Thirty-five percent of departments had some assessment structures in place but were far from having accreditation-ready plans. Another 40 percent of departments had implemented sophisticated—but nonstandardized—internal assessment systems. Finally, 5 percent of departments had robust, accreditation-worthy assessment plans in place. These tended to be departments in fields such as engineering or education, where learning assessment has long been required by professional certification bodies. Because faculty in these departments felt like they were already

conducting significant assessment of student learning, they were resistant to performing any additional assessment-related tasks for regional accreditation.

The Council realized that, because it is so challenging for universities to ensure that all departments have standardized assessment plans in place, it would be useful for institutions to have a mechanism that served both ends of the experience spectrum. The ideal tool would make it easier for those departments that do not have assessment plans to create them and also make it simpler for those departments that already have assessment plans in place to translate this work into accreditation-worthy documentation. In the course of our research we were fortunate to find an online tool that serves both of these purposes: Georgia Tech's Online Assessment Tracking System, or OATS.

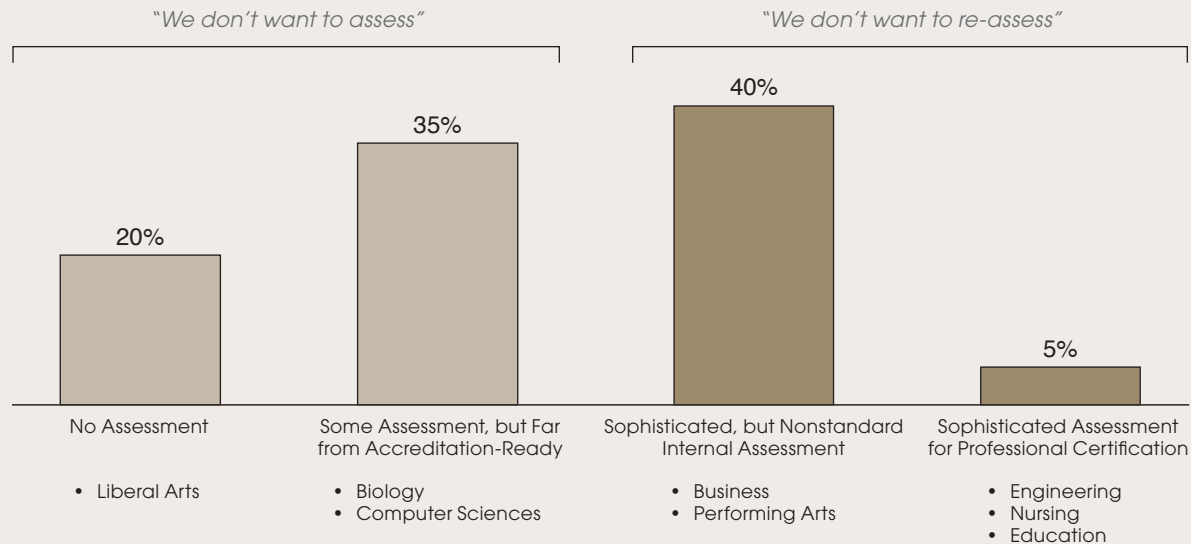
Helping "First-Timers" Create Accreditation-Ready Plans

Georgia Tech is well known for the caliber and breadth of its engineering programs. Several years ago, as administrators were preparing for regional accreditation, they experienced intense resistance from faculty regarding student learning outcomes assessment. These faculty members said they didn't want to "re-assess," as they were already thoroughly documenting assessment in order to meet the requirements of ABET, the professional accreditor for university programs in engineering. In response to these concerns, Georgia Tech's assessment office (working out of academic affairs) created OATS, a homegrown online accreditation report builder.

Both Inexperienced and Experienced Departments Resist Assessment

Fig. 2.1

Midsize Land Grant University's Survey of 80 Departments



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

The OATS system, a fairly basic software tool, standardizes and normalizes the assessment and accreditation documentation processes taking place across campus. Because many universities lack reporting standards for documenting departmental assessment plans, institutions often receive accreditation citations even when they are in compliance with accreditation expectations—

simply because the information was not reported or recorded appropriately. OATS makes accreditation documentation easier by housing detailed, department-specific assessment plans and results in a standardized format for accreditation reporting purposes. Because OATS includes instructions for cutting and pasting departments' pre-existing plans into a standard format, it helps department liaisons reduce the work of translating their current assessment plans into accreditation-appropriate form. OATS collects information in fields such as "mission," "learning objectives," and "results" that correspond explicitly with accreditation requirements, housing all the information needed for universities to document assessment of student learning across departments successfully. (Fig. 2.2)

Users who encounter difficulty translating their department's plan into the required format can obtain instant assistance from OATS's comprehensive help function, which provides definitions of key terms as well as detailed instructions and sample language for completing each section. (Fig. 2.3) While the help function was not originally created to enable users to create a new assessment plan from scratch or to flesh out an underdeveloped plan, the information in the system is detailed enough to serve this purpose.

Case in Brief



Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia

- Assessment department created online tracking repository for department-level outcomes documentation
- System provides instruction on how to cut and paste sections from nonstandard, internal, or external assessment plans into standard institutional format
- Help screens assist non-expert faculty to identify missing requirements of accreditation-caliber assessment in existing department plans, with prompts for remediation

Georgia Tech's Online Assessment Tracking System (OATS)

Fig. 2.2

Mission
The mission of the electrical engineering program is to prepare students for engineering practice by educating them through a "systems" approach to understanding the functions and uses of electrical and optical signals and devices.

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to recognize the primary components of electrical systems
- Students will understand the complexities of generating electricity in a world of dwindling resources

Results
Through a faculty review of student work products, including recorded oral presentation, graded essays, and in-class final exams, it was determined that:

- 45% of students meet to a satisfactory degree or higher faculty expectations in their ability to recognize electrical system components
- 15% of students understand to a satisfactory degree or higher the complexities of generating electricity in a world of dwindling resources

Action Steps
The assessment results indicate a greater need for classroom attention given to the above learning objectives. The faculty committee recommends the following actions to be implemented fall semester 2008: coinciding with the addition of one extra teaching assistant to each 100 level class, additional outside the classroom laboratory experience will be required of all students enrolled in these lower-level courses.

Help

Cut-and-paste instructions for translating nonstandard plans into standard format

Help screens prompt faculty on missing/unfamiliar requirements

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Illustrative OATS Help Screen

Fig. 2.3

Georgia Institute of Technology

Help Menu

Defining Learning Objectives

- Align outcomes with the mission, vision, values and goals of the program
- Describe the expected abilities, knowledge, values, and attitudes of graduates of the program
- State simply the outcomes using action verbs, to specify definite, observable behaviors
- Describe student rather than teacher behavior
- Delineate outcomes rather than processes
- Choose outcomes where it is possible to use more than one measurement technique

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Students will be able to articulate the relevancy of _____ in an increasingly global economy

Measuring Learning Outcomes

- Provide an objective means of quantifying the outcomes, quality or efficiency of the program
- Indicate how each outcome will be measured (test, survey, observation, assignment, performance rating, etc.)
- Provide at least two ways to measure each outcome
- Indicate who will be measured and by whom (students, focus group, customers, etc.)
- Determine when each outcome will be measured

Example: Test the students at the end of the program for the level of knowledge in XYZ

[Click Here to Schedule Appointment with Assessment Office](#)

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Through the help function, users can access outlines of all components of an accreditation-ready plan.

As an additional benefit, OATS also reduces the work of updating plans each year. While assessment methodologies, results, and impacts will change yearly, OATS eliminates the need for department liaisons to update the up-front information that remains constant for each reporting cycle.

Leveraging Assessment Office Time

In addition to saving assessment liaisons time in creating and documenting their assessment plans, the OATS system also optimizes the time assessment office staff spend intervening with departments who are falling behind. OATS automatically aggregates individual departmental assessment plans into a centralized dashboard that tracks each department's assessment reporting status. The system provides

Keep It Simple

"We don't need or want elaborate plans. Instead, OATS prompts departments to write concise statements of learning expectations in a standard format."

Director of Assessment
Georgia Tech

assessment office staff with a real-time view for each department of the number of outcomes entered, methods used, results recorded, and actions summaries completed—plus the date each category was last modified. (Fig. 2.4)

Departments' overall assessment plan status (complete, in process, or not started) is also summarized in the dashboard, allowing the Georgia

Online Dashboard Allows "Spot Checks"

Fig. 2.4

Degree—Plan (Plan Code)		Objectives/ Outcomes	Methods	Results	Action Summaries	Status	
Edit	Assessment Update for: Bachelor of Science in Engineering— Computer Engineering	10 19 Jan 2007	40 04 Feb 2007	40 19 Jan 2007	10 19 Jan 2007	Complete	• Accreditation-Ready
Edit	Assessment Update for: Bachelor of Science in Engineering— Electrical Engineering	14 23 Jan 2007	38 12 Feb 2007	0	0	In Process	• E-mail Reminder
Edit	Assessment Update for: Master of Science— Electrical Engineering	0	0	0	0	Not Started	• Proactive Outreach

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Tech assessment office to conduct a spot check of the readiness of all departments. By monitoring the dashboard, assessment office staff can quickly identify departments that are falling behind in their assessment work and offer assistance before it is too late to get back on pace for accreditation.

OATS has been transformational in increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Georgia Tech assessment office staff's time. In the past, the assessment office held assessment workshops that tended to attract the same faculty—those already well versed in assessment. When regional accreditation was approaching, assessment office staff would have to check in with each and every department, often spending time on departments that had sufficient assessment plans at the expense of those departments that needed intervention. In contrast, OATS' dashboard mechanism allows Georgia Tech's assessment office staff to manage by exception—prodding those departments that are falling behind in their assessment documentation and identifying early those departments that are far behind and in need of one-on-one coaching.

Managing by Exception

"In a paper and pencil reporting system, it's hard to check in on programs—there's no visibility. With OATS, I can spot-check programs' progress and plans. This helps me to see which programs are struggling and allows me to focus attention there. We have close to 100 percent compliance without me having to meet with every single department."

Director of Assessment
Georgia Tech

An Open Source Tool Available to Any Institution

Perhaps the best part of OATS, from the standpoint of other universities, is that it is available free of charge from Georgia Tech via download of open source code. Georgia Tech's assessment office has chosen to make the software available to any other higher education institution that might find it useful. The program can be edited to suit individual university's needs and is adaptable for any regional or professional accrediting body.

The University of Connecticut successfully adopted the OATS program for the institution's own accreditation management needs. UConn compared OATS with commercial assessment management systems, as well as a similar homegrown program available through another state university, and decided on OATS because it was both simpler to implement and less expensive.

While there is no charge for downloading the OATS software from Georgia Tech, there are some one-time direct costs associated with implementing the system. The University of Connecticut estimates that their up-front investment in OATS totaled approximately \$52,000. (Fig. 2.5) UConn spent \$28,000 on software licensing and hardware (universities adopting OATS will need to pay for ColdFusion and EditLive! licenses if they do not own them already) and paid a semester's salary for one full-time IT employee to perform server maintenance and upgrades and make minor edits. UConn's assessment director also spent time and resources writing a 50-page user's manual. Additionally, UConn estimates that average recurring annual costs for hosting OATS (primarily licensing renewals and IT maintenance) will total \$10,000 per year.

UConn acquired OATS in spring 2007 and made modifications to the program over the spring and summer, rolling OATS out to faculty users in fall 2007. The university predicts OATS' simple and low-burden reporting will allow full adoption by 14 colleges and over 100 programs in approximately two years' time, with graduate programs to follow.

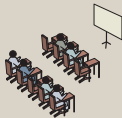
Since implementing OATS in the fall of 2007, UConn has seen a tremendous increase in the percentage of departments with accreditation-ready assessment plans. Before OATS, only 50 percent of departments had accreditation-ready plans. Nine months after implementing OATS, UConn estimates that a full 98 percent of their departments have documented plans that meet accreditation expectations. University administrators feel that this result would have been impossible, or at least very arduous and time-intensive, in the absence of the OATS online tool.

"Sustainable" Accreditation

By reducing the effort involved in reporting for accreditation, OATS assisted UConn in making assessment reporting an ongoing and more sustainable

Implementation Costs at University of Connecticut

Fig. 2.5

Roll out to 100 programs in 24 months	 Software Licensing/Hardware • Cold Fusion License • EditLive! License • Purchase of Two New Servers	\$28,000
	 In-House IT Labor • Server Installation/Maintenance • Minor Cosmetic/Technical Upgrades	\$20,000
	 Training • User Manual (50 hours) • Programs (10 total hours provided)	\$4,000
Total:		\$52,000

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

exercise. Previously, UConn's assessment director had to spend time reviewing each program's plans for compliance, aggregating assessment data, standardizing plans and evidence, and preparing accreditation reports. By implementing OATS UConn was able to shave off 80 percent of the effort associated with reporting for accreditation. Through OATS, ongoing review of program reporting allows assurance of department compliance, standard inputs remove the need for standardizing disparate plans, and online reporting removes all need for the assessment director to collect and compile assessment plans for accrediting purposes. Assessment reporting is now more sustainable because it is less work for assessment office staff.

Additionally, UConn is ahead of a potentially burdensome accreditor expectation. In five years' time it is conceivable that universities will not be allowed to submit paper-based accreditation documentation. OATS has enabled UConn to provide its accreditor with

Downloading OATS for Use at Your Institution

- Information on the OATS system requirements is available at:
https://gtwebapps.gatech.edu/cfeis/oats/aa_system_requirements.cfm
- OATS is available for download at:
<http://www.assessment.gatech.edu/OATS.zip>
- Institutions that obtain and install OATS are asked to agree not to request installation or operational support from Georgia Tech

a single URL containing assessment documentation that, in paper form, stretched across 1,500 pages, making accreditation reporting more sustainable for the environment as well.

Practice #2: Reusable Assessment Tools Database, Carnegie Mellon University

While Georgia Tech's OATS tool significantly reduces time and expertise burdens of basic assessment reporting, its principal purpose is not to help educate faculty about the full range of assessment methodologies. Taking a different approach, Carnegie Mellon University is developing a searchable online database of assessment best practices already in place on campus to help departments and instructors select and implement methodologies most appropriate for local teaching philosophy and resource constraints.

As the university's regional accreditation approached, Carnegie Mellon considered four facts:

- accreditors are placing increased emphasis on ensuring that all departments have assessment plans;
- putting departments on deadline to develop assessment plans for accreditation purposes would be both logistically and politically difficult;
- any type of standardized assessment methodology recommended by central administration would face significant faculty resistance;

Case in Brief

Carnegie Mellon

*Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

- Provost charters assessment task force partnering with Teaching and Learning Center and college faculty to identify and catalog ongoing assessment practice on campus
- Funds provided to hire dedicated project manager
- Goal: Provide ready-made assessment templates and on-campus directory of practitioners to help all departments achieve to accreditation-worthy assessment standards within a "reasonable" time frame

- Carnegie Mellon, renowned for its "culture of evidence," had dozens of world-class assessment practices already in place around campus.

In light of these factors, the provost created a three-year task force charged with finding, collecting, and

Online Department Assessment Survey

Fig. 2.6

Please indicate if or how often your department collects feedback from each of the following sources (feedback can be written, based on interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc.)

Carnegie Mellon	Not Collected	Annually	Every 2-4 Years	Every 5-10 Years	Sporadically
Advisory Boards	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Alumni	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Current Students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Graduating Seniors	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
Faculty	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
Employers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Learning Outcomes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Co-Curricular Activities	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐
Graduate or Professional School Exams (GRE, LSAT, MCATs, etc)	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Graduate School Acceptances	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐
Students' professional publications, conference presentations, performances, patents	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Awards, Fellowships, Scholarships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

inventorying the many effective assessment methods that were already being employed across campus. The task force's goal was to help the university "know what they knew." To ensure that all segments of the campus were enfranchised in the process, the task force included one faculty member from each of the university's seven colleges. A full-time project manager (housed in the Carnegie Mellon's Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence) was hired to support and drive the process.

The project manager first created an online survey, then distributed it electronically to each department, soliciting information on whom, how often, and how the department assessed. (Fig. 2.6) The faculty on the task force then reviewed the assessment methodologies to identify those that would provide useful models for other faculty and departments. After culling methods that might be excessively labor intensive, discipline specific, or philosophically contentious, the task force identified assessment methods suitable for emulation, including several innovative approaches that were not widely known across the campus.

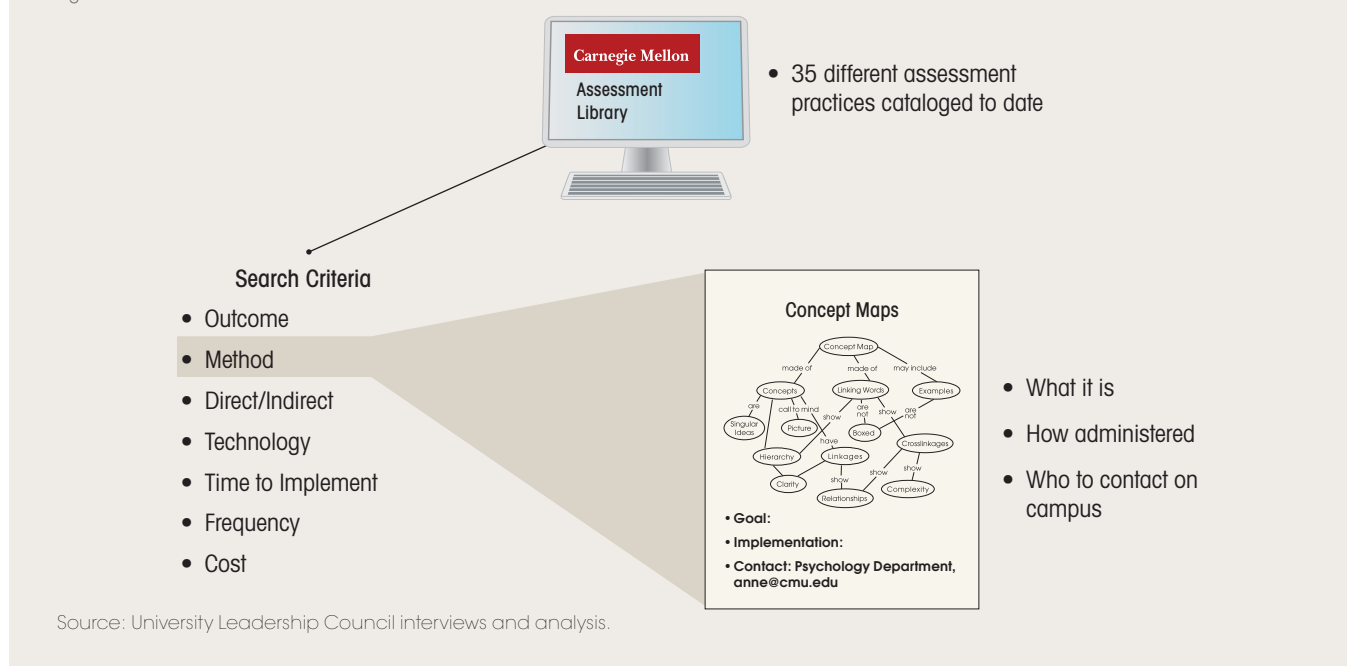
As of this writing, the task force has cataloged and uploaded 35 distinct assessment methods identified and vetted through the survey process into a searchable database. (Fig. 2.7) The site cross-references

each approach by multiple search criteria—type of learning outcome measured, specific assessment method, required technology, time to implement, cost, and frequency, so that faculty may examine ideas for assessment techniques sorted by whatever their most pressing criterion might be. Clicking on a practice takes faculty to a thumbnail overview of the assessment method, along with contact information for faculty already using the method on campus, enabling peer-to-peer networking about the idea among faculty who might not otherwise have been put in contact with one another.

The greatest virtue of Carnegie Mellon's assessment tools database is that it strikes the important but elusive balance between autonomy and standardization. No single assessment method is imposed on faculty; they are free to choose among a generous and comprehensive sample of methods. Faculty are guided toward only vetted practices, but approval is generated by the dual peer review of, first, the faculty who initially adopted the assessment method and, second, the faculty task force that evaluated the practices. By structuring approval of assessment methods around faculty choices, Carnegie Mellon has avoided the faculty resistance so often elicited by assessment directives that merely delivered from above.

Evolving Search Features of Assessment Template Library

Fig. 2.7



Key Principles: Balancing Autonomy and Standardization

- Templatize assessment plans and reports to optimize scarce faculty time toward outcomes articulation
- Centralize assessment reports in user-friendly, accreditation-compliant online repository
- Provide “self-service” feature to assist faculty in translating assessment plans into accreditation-compliant language
- Conduct online spot-checks to prioritize assessment office outreach
- Strive for paperless accreditation filing
- Fund project manager or task force to inventory existing internal assessment practices
- Realize efficiencies through replicating and adopting proven assessment practices
- Online tools and reusable templates can reduce assessment effort by 80 percent



II. Scaling Direct Assessment of Student Work

Departments break cost-quality compromise by coding electronic student coursework for easy sample aggregation and sophisticated assessment

#3 Course Assignment Outcomes Coding

The Challenge of Scaling Direct Assessment of Student Work

The second challenge of engaging faculty in assessment is reducing the labor-intensity of so-called “direct” assessment methods. Regional accreditors are insisting that universities complement traditional indirect measures of student learning (such as grades and surveys) with direct evaluation of student competency, preferably from classroom artifacts—real assignments submitted in actual courses for a grade. Collecting and analyzing student work for the purposes of program- or institution-level assessment is, however, a difficult and time-intensive task.

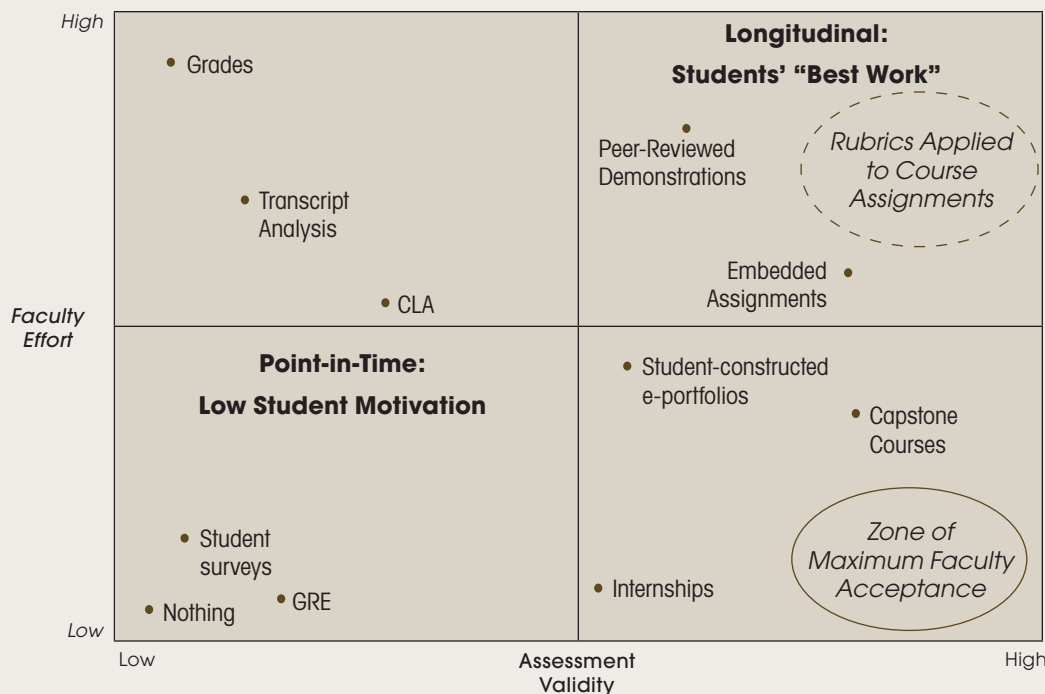
To gather samples of student artifacts for direct assessment, administrators often find themselves running from college to college and department to department begging faculty members and graduate assistants for any student papers or tests they happen to have available. Not only is this process an inefficient use of assessment officer time, the sample of artifacts administrators collect usually is far from random. If faculty members do have spare student artifacts that

they are willing to turn over to the assessment officer, these are typically work products that either are not major assignments or that have been completed by apathetic students who never picked up their work.

Even with an appropriate sample of student artifacts in hand, the work of assessing those assignments with a common rubric to measure program- and institution-level performance is arduous. (Fig. 2.8) This time burden of direct assessment methods presents the greatest barrier to their adoption. Low-effort direct measures like standardized tests or student-constructed e-portfolios require little faculty time, but face validity concerns. Rubrics applied by assessment committees to actual course assignments, by contrast, are highly valid but seem to require time commitments infeasible for most universities. Yet as grades and surveys are no longer passing muster with accreditors, institutions must find ways to perform direct assessment without requiring unrealistic amounts of faculty effort.

High-Validity Assessments Require Greatest Faculty Effort

Fig. 2.8



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Practice #3: Course Assignment Outcomes Coding

At Fairfield University, Curtis Naser has created a homegrown assessment management tool that facilitates collection of student artifacts and reduces the faculty time required to analyze those artifacts for learning outcomes assessment. A philosophy professor with additional expertise in both assessment and computer programming, Naser capitalized on the increasing proportion of assignments submitted electronically. In 2005, he created an assessment tool—named EIDOS after the Greek word for “idea”—that was integrated into Fairfield’s preexisting course management system.

EIDOS enables faculty to link course assignments to specific learning outcomes at the time the assignment is created. When uploading assignments into course websites, faculty are presented with a list of outcomes; by clicking the appropriate boxes, the relevant outcomes become linked to that assignment. (Fig. 2.9)

When a student submits a completed assignment online, the paper is tagged with the learning outcomes associated with the assignment.

The resulting database of student artifacts allows assessment committees to generate a representative sample of student work products quickly and easily.

(Fig. 2.10) With a few keystrokes, the committee can gather student artifacts from an array of courses that are linked to a particular learning outcome. Because artifacts are pulled from a large pool at random, this method produces samples that are far more representative of the average level of student competency than other sampling methods.

When the assessment committee begins analyzing the sample of artifacts, EIDOS saves time by helping the committee efficiently reach consensus on how artifacts should be rated. After members evaluate

Tagging Outcomes to Assignments in EIDOS

Fig. 2.9

Assignment

Paper No.1 Title: ID Report Weight: 7.5%

Check All That Apply: Display Selected Objectives to Students ☐ Help

Goals:

- ☒ 1. [Acquisition of Knowledge](#)
- ☐ 2. [Personal Skills](#)
- ☐ 3. [Technological Competencies](#)

Objectives—Each Student Should Demonstrate Competence In:

- ☒ 1. [Critical Thinking Skills](#)
- ☒ 2. [Written Communication Skills](#)
- ☐ 3. [Oral Communication Skills](#)
- ☐ 4. [Interdisciplinary Business Issues](#)
- ☐ 5. [International Business Issues](#)
- ☐ 6. [Teamwork Skills](#)
- ☐ 7. [Leadership Skills](#)
- ☐ 8. [Ethical and Legal Issues](#)
- ☐ 9. [Social Responsibility Issues](#)
- ☐ 10. [Technological Skills](#)
- ☐ 11. [Data Analysis Skills](#)

Fairfield UNIVERSITY

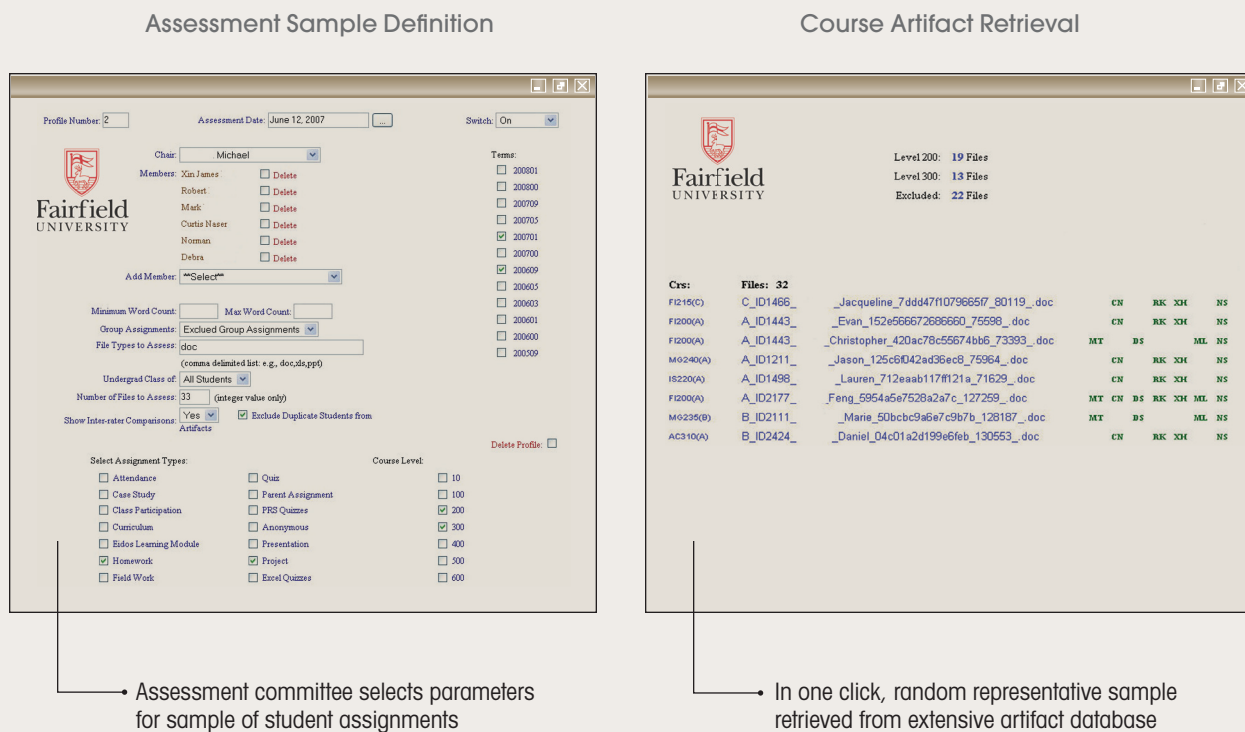
1. Professor selects all program goals

2. Professor then tags all learning outcomes

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Generating Random Samples of Assignments

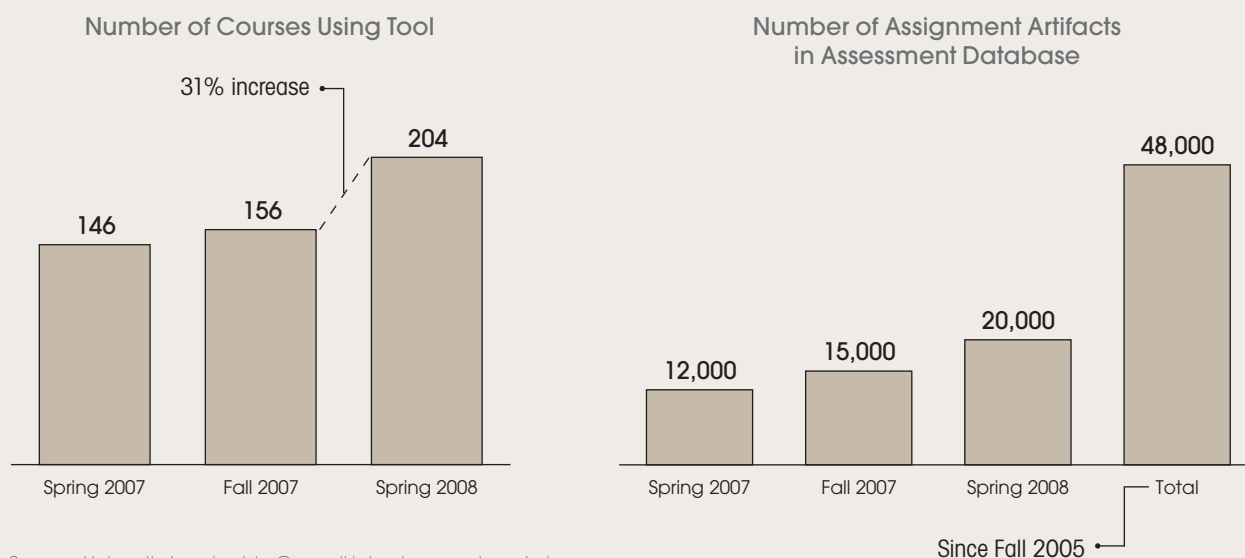
Fig. 2.10



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Increase in EIDOS Use, 2007–2008

Fig. 2.11



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

each artifact in the sample and input their rating into EIDOS, the system flags the instances in which assessors' ratings of the same artifact vary significantly. The committee can then convene to discuss their application of the evaluation rubric and arrive at a common understanding of what level of performance merits each score. This method greatly reduces time spent calibrating the committee's application of the rubric, as committee members do not have to discuss the evaluation of all artifacts, only those on which their individual ratings vary considerably. In addition, the system also ensures that one or two assessment

committee members do not skew the overall results.

As word of EIDOS' faculty-friendly interface and sophisticated capabilities has spread throughout the university, Fairfield has seen a significant increase in the number of courses that utilize the tool. (Fig. 2.11) Between fall 2005 and spring 2008, 247 courses used the EIDOS system, producing an archive of 48,000 tagged student artifacts. As this pool of student artifacts increases, so too will Fairfield's ability to do sophisticated and longitudinal analyses of actual student work products.

Collecting Student Artifacts for Direct Assessment

Questions to Consider When Selecting an Assessment Management Tool

The ever-increasing quotient of student assignments being submitted electronically, coupled with the avowed plans of commercial course and assessment management system vendors to include EIDOS-like functionalities in their next-generation releases, suggests that the assessment-scaling concepts currently unique to EIDOS may soon be mainstream capabilities in most assessment management systems.

While the Advisory Board is not a technology evaluation company, and while we do not customarily appraise

technology tools, the Council thought it might be beneficial for provosts to have some baseline guidance on this issue. After speaking with representatives from nine top commercial assessment management system vendors about functionalities that would enable universities to scale direct assessment, the Council recommends that provosts consider the following questions when adopting or upgrading an assessment management system.

1. Does the assessment management system link seamlessly with pre-existing course management systems?

- Can student data and artifacts be easily accessed and uploaded from any course management system?
- Does the assessment management system provide "single-sign on" authentication, such that users need only to enter their user name and password to access both systems?
- Are student assignments housed and archived on the server for later (post-semester) retrieval?

2. Can instructors tag the assignments they develop with associated outcomes?

- Can instructors pull up a menu of program- and institution-level outcomes from which to select when tagging assignments with outcomes?
- Before completing an assignment, can students then view a list of the associated outcomes they will be expected to demonstrate?
- Can students also view the rubric(s) with which they will be assessed?

3. Can the system easily generate random samples of student artifacts?

- Does the system allow administrators to pull randomized student artifacts across courses and departments?
- Can these artifacts be pulled according to the program- and institution-level outcomes with which they are associated?



III. Incenting General Education Reform

University uses direct and indirect incentives to catalyze comprehensive mapping of general education curriculum to learning outcomes

#4 Junior Faculty Course Redesign Bonuses

#5 Tenure Review Assessment Dossiers

#6 General Education Eligibility Recertification

Incenting General Education Reform

Reducing the time burden of assessment activity is only half of the equation in sustaining faculty engagement in assessment over the long term. To ensure that faculty continue to focus on assessment between accreditation visits, assessment activities must be integrated into meaningful curricular and budgetary decisions.

For many universities, the highest-profile set of decisions connected to outcomes assessment relate to efforts to revitalize the general education curriculum. Whether a planned comprehensive modernization of the core curriculum or a campaign to improve student success metrics in introductory courses, the moment of general education improvement can serve as an occasion to deploy assessment processes for general education objectives.

However, implementing an assessment program for general education objectives is perhaps the most

difficult of the newer accreditation requirements to meet. As difficult as the process is at the department level, for the institution as a whole it is more so. Few universities have a governance process well suited to the potentially contentious process of defining such criteria, and the Council encountered many universities that “gave up” after fractious, unproductive efforts to define institutional outcomes.

Because no single department has the purview and authority to convene a discussion about what constitutes critical thinking or information literacy in the modern university, responsibility for achieving accreditation-ready general education goals is typically falling to the provost’s office. Across the following pages, we profile three strategies for managing implementation of general education objectives that avoid the twin pitfalls of “death by committee” and faculty resistance.

Practice #4: Junior Faculty Course Redesign Bonuses

Applying the 80–20 Rule to Fix High-Enrollment Intro Courses

Pursuing a strategy appropriate for institutions with large enrollments or mandates to increase access, the University of Alabama has focused on redesigning high-enrollment introductory courses with rates

of low student success. During the 1990s, Alabama was suffering from the predicament affecting many universities: higher-enrollment introductory courses were broken across the board—and likely to get worse.

(Fig. 2.12) The percentage of students earning a C or better in math introductory courses at Alabama was below 50 percent. A large portion of these students subsequently wound up on academic probation and at risk for failing out of school.

Projections for rapid growth in Alabama’s undergraduate enrollment added to the urgency of fixing the problem. The university’s student population was projected to grow by 45 percent between 2003 and 2009. For some time, the institution had been meeting growing demand for introductory courses by hiring part-time adjunct faculty. Since adjuncts often had little training and low commitment to the university, the quality of teaching was becoming increasingly uneven across sections of introductory courses. Without making dramatic changes in its approach, the university’s low student success rates in introductory courses and resulting retention problems were likely to worsen.

Case in Brief

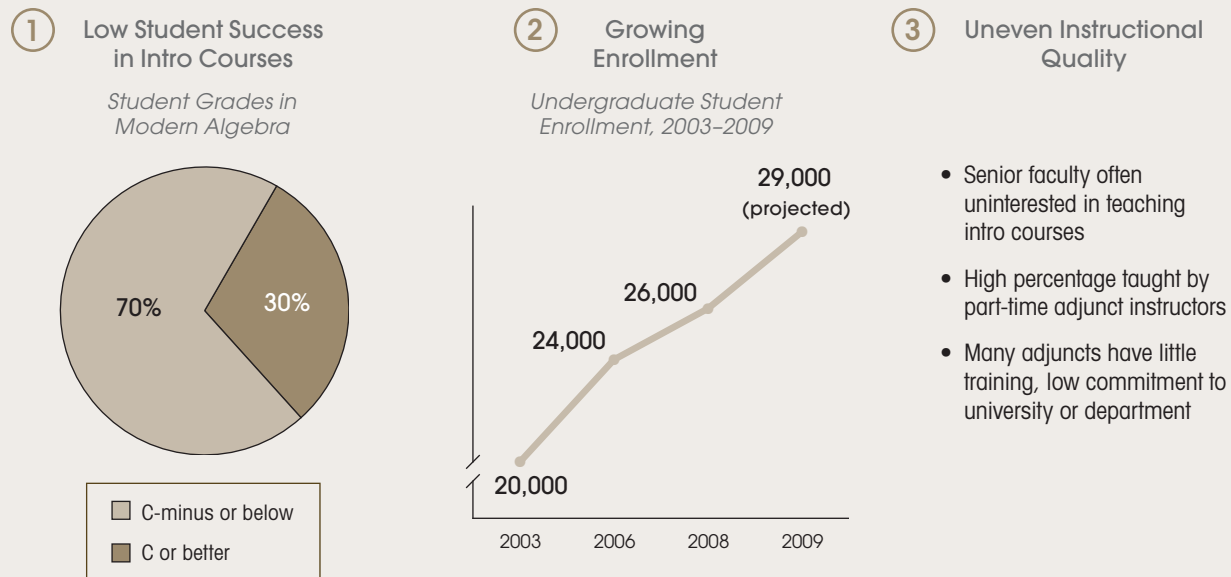


*The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, Alabama*

- Dean of Arts and Sciences funds development of five-module workshop on embedding learner-centric outcomes and teaching methodologies
- 25-person classes offered twice yearly; open to all, but most popular with early-career faculty
- Participants’ capstone is redesign for intro-level courses they teach, to be implemented in following semester
- Expected to consult “e-Tech” classroom technology center of excellence

General Education Challenges at The University of Alabama

Fig. 2.12



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

To address these problems and at the same time build learning outcomes into general education courses, Alabama decided to adopt the Emporium model developed by Robert Olin. While chair of the mathematics department at Virginia Tech, Olin achieved a national reputation for creating the Math Emporium, which replaces traditional lecture-style introductory math courses with a format that blends classroom instruction with self-paced online tutorials and access to one-on-one assistance. Students access tutorials in a computer lab while undergraduate and graduate tutors circulate to offer individual assistance. At Virginia Tech, the Math Emporium model significantly improved student outcomes and course grades while reducing costs. In 2000, Alabama recruited Olin to the role of dean of the college of arts and sciences with an express mandate to replicate the Emporium model across introductory courses in the college.

Olin's success at Alabama owes much to his decision to focus on the courses that touch the greatest number of students and the faculty most likely to be receptive to his approach. Rather than attempting to reform every course, or even every introductory course, Olin began with the high-enrollment general education introductory courses that affected a large portion of the student body. Olin also focused on faculty who

were earlier in their career and thus more open to assessment as well as more likely to respond to the cash incentives offered for participation.

An Assessment Workshop

Shortly after arriving at Alabama, Olin began recruiting early-career faculty to participate in a professional development series on assessment, which was developed and coordinated by the associate dean

A Pragmatic Approach to Reform

Rule #1

Start with Highest-Need Courses

- High enrollment (200+ students)
- Low success rate (50% of students C– or lower)
- Low attendance (25% absence)

Rule #2

Focus on Early-Career Faculty

- More open to assessment
- Easier to incent behavioral change

Focusing Incentives Where They Have Most Impact

"I'm not saying there aren't plenty of senior faculty who care deeply about teaching. I'm simply observing that the professional, financial, and training levers a dean possesses have more impact on junior faculty, and that we're more likely to achieve culture change by focusing on the next generation than by forcing conversions among the old guard."

Bob Olin
Dean of Arts and Science,
The University of Alabama

in the College of Arts and Sciences. The series contains five two-hour modules on topics ranging from "Writing Learning Outcomes" to "Documenting the Assessment Cycle." (Fig. 2.13) Completing the workshop requires a total of 20 hours of faculty time: 10 hours to attend the workshops and 10 hours to complete the capstone assignment, in which participants redesigned a course they are currently teaching according to the principles of the workshops. Participants bring their existing course plan to the first workshop session and gradually redesign the course across the session, building learning outcomes assessment and more active and collaborative pedagogical strategies into the course. To become confident using the new technologies promoted in the workshops, participants were encouraged take advantage of "e-Tech"—Alabama's in-house technology

Assessment Workshop Modules

Fig. 2.13

- #1 Intro to Assessment
- #2 Writing Learning Outcomes
- #3 Aligning Assessments with Outcomes
- #4 Evaluating Results
- #5 Documenting the Assessment Cycle

consulting office charged with supporting faculty in incorporating new classroom technologies (such as electronic "clickers" that enable students to deliver automated feedback during class sessions).

Alabama's assessment workshop avoided two problems that typically plague assessment training. First, as many interviewees observed, assessment workshops often produce few actual work products, and faculty commonly underutilize on-campus resources that exist to help them incorporate technology into their classrooms. By making redesigned course plans the culminating event of its assessment training series and introducing participants to the campus's instructional technology office, Alabama averted both of these pitfalls.

Making Assessment Training Worth Their Time

Another crucial element of Alabama's approach is payment of cash incentives as compensation for time spent completing workshop sessions and implementing a redesigned course. Faculty who participate in the assessment training series are eligible for \$1,000 bonus payment. Participants received \$500 for attending the five-workshop series and another \$500 for implementing their course redesign blueprint during the next available semester. With the time to complete all obligations totaling 20 hours, the bonus translates into a \$50-per-hour rate of compensation.

This incentive payment has differing appeal for early-career and later-career faculty. Due to their lower salaries and more limited potential for supplemental earnings, junior faculty members are more sensitive to a \$50-per-hour bonus. While \$50 per hour may not seem like much to senior faculty members who can sell out their discretionary time at consulting rates that are upwards of \$100 per hour, \$50 per hour is more than twice as much as the approximately \$20 per hour junior faculty members typically earn.

Two Defining Attributes of Learner-Centric Redesign

Redesigned courses must meet two criteria for "learner-centric" pedagogy for faculty to earn the second \$500 of the bonus. (Fig. 2.14) First, instead of relying on traditional auditorium lectures, courses must employ an interactive format that engages students in active

learning. In Alabama's redesigned Sociology 101, for example, students spend two hours per week on self-paced online instruction, completing individual work modules, viewing recorded lectures, and answering review questions in a computer lab staffed with tutors ready to offer individual assistance. The remaining third of class time is spent in a weekly discussion group.

Second, assignments and evaluations must be structured so course grades reflect attainment of specific learning outcomes. Outcomes-based assessment questions are embedded into both assignments and the final exam, and instructors for all course sections are trained to grade consistently. Therefore, an "A" in Alabama's redesigned Sociology 101, for example, denotes a specific level of outcomes attainment. Grades have comparable meaning across sections and become accreditation-acceptable as a direct measure of student learning outcomes.

Admittedly, convincing faculty to adopt a common and outcomes-focused evaluation system for their department's introductory courses may be particularly challenging in low-consensus fields, such as literary

studies. Nonetheless, Alabama has found this approach less controversial among faculty and more effective for its students than other strategies integrating learning outcomes assessment into general education courses.

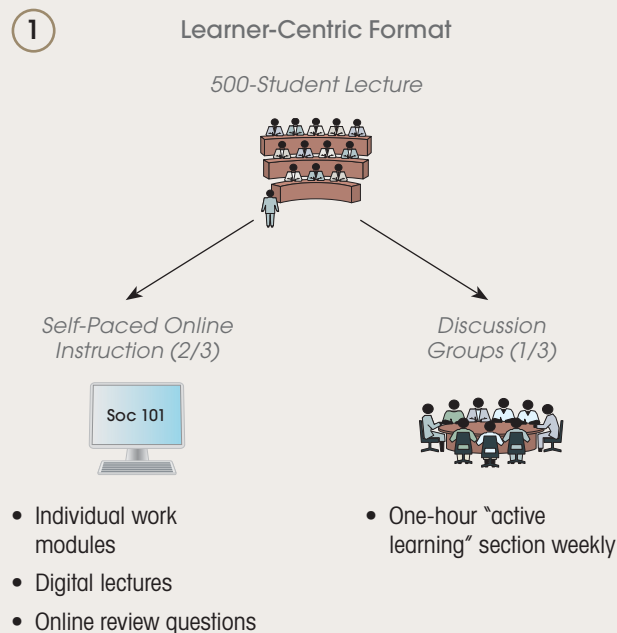
5 Principles of Successful Course Redesign

From The National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT)

- Redesign the whole course (not just one class or section)
- Encourage "active learning" by replacing lectures with interactive materials and activities that move students from a passive note-taking role to an active-learning orientation ("Students learn math by doing math")
- Provide students with individualized assistance
- Incorporate ongoing assessment and prompt, automated feedback
- Ensure sufficient time-on-task and monitor student progress

Sociology 101 Redesign (Illustrative)

Fig. 2.14



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

2 **Grades Mapped to Outcomes**

Sociology 101			
Problem Solving	C	B	A
Communication	C	B	A
Domain Knowledge	C	B	A

- Grades denote specific outcomes and competencies
- "Assessment events" embedded in tests, papers
- Common final exam among all sections
- Instructors trained to apply grades consistently

From Math to Writing

Across the last few years, Alabama has significantly increased both the total enrollment of learner-centric courses and the breadth of offerings. (Fig. 2.15) The university has been successful in redesigning courses not only in math and foreign languages, which lend themselves to a learning lab format, but also in a broad range of disciplines such as biology, mass communications, nutrition, archeology, politics, and even mythology. Alabama's most ambitious endeavor to date is a migrating introductory English Composition to a learner-centric design, which will affect an estimated 3,600 students in the 2008–2009 academic year.

Better Outcomes for More Students Without Additional Cost

Alabama's learner-centric redesign of introductory courses has produced impressive gains in student learning outcomes without decreasing student satisfaction or increasing course costs. In Sociology 101, the percentage of students receiving a "B" or

above increased from 54 percent to 71 percent after implementation of the learner-centric format, and students appear just as happy with the new format as the old one, as course evaluation scores have remained constant. While achieving this level of student achievement and satisfaction, the university has also dramatically expanded enrollment capacity in this chronically oversubscribed course. In 2006, Sociology 101 could accommodate 190 students; by 2010, the course will be able to accommodate 1,000 students, with the cost-per-student for the course remaining constant at \$45. (Fig. 2.16)

Results for math courses have been even more extraordinary. The "success rate," or percentage of students receiving a "C" or better, increased from 45 percent to 70 percent following course redesign, and success rates for women and minorities (populations typically underserved in math) now outpaced those of the general student population. Most remarkably, these gains have been achieved while spending less, not more, on instruction. The course redesign decreased the average math course's cost-per-student from \$116 to \$83 per semester.

Timeline of Learner-Centric Course Launches

Fig. 2.15



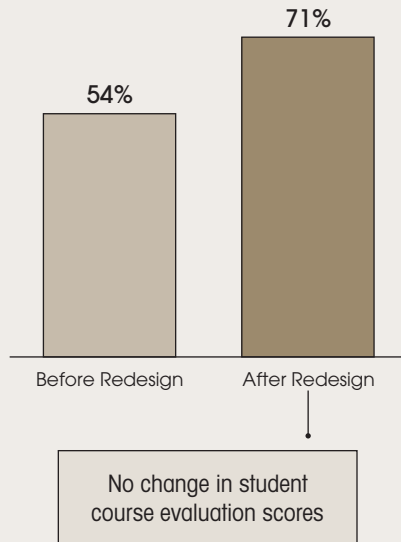
Pilot Courses (2001–2004)	Cohort I (2005–2006)	Cohort II (2006–2007)	Cohort III (2008–2009)
Intermediate Algebra	Biology for Non-Majors	General Physics with Calculus	Intro to American Politics
Remedial Mathematics	Intro to Mass Communications	Great Discoveries in Archeology	Elementary German
Finite Math	Human Nutrition	Introductory Spanish II	Greek and Roman Mythology
Precalculus Algebra	Introductory Spanish I		Public Speaking
			English Composition (3,300 Students)
	250 Students	450 Students	4,650 Students

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

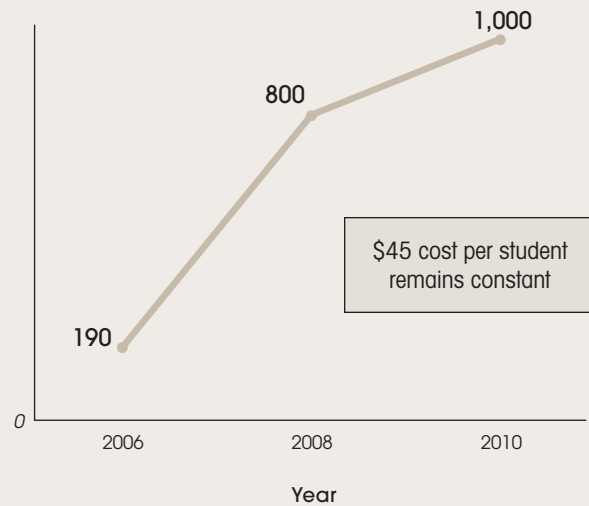
Learner-Centric Sociology 101 Course Results

Fig. 2.16

Students Receiving “B” or Above in Soc 101 Course



Student Enrollment in Soc 101



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

A Long-Term Investing in Building an Assessment Culture

At \$45,000 per year, Alabama’s annual spending on incentives for faculty to complete assessment workshops and implement redesigned courses is substantial. However, from the university’s perspective, the benefits of the course redesign program far outweigh its costs. In addition to producing immediate gains in student achievement, the program is building a culture of assessment at the university without an expensive and contentious top-down overhaul of the general education curriculum. With over 30 faculty members per year implementing redesigned courses, Alabama expects that, in five years’ time, 70 percent of introductory courses will be redesigned according to learner-centric principles, at least 60 percent of students will be enrolled in at least one learner-centric course during their first two years of studies, and 50 percent of recently hired faculty members will have graduated from the assessment workshop series. Additionally, the course redesign program is also enabling Alabama to gather rich comparative data about the relative effectiveness of various pedagogical and curricular techniques.

Worth the Money and the Wait

“Forty-thousand is a lot to pay for a faculty incentive. But, when you consider the cultural changes, it’s absolutely worth it. In time, most of our faculty will have had the same assessment training, we’ll have a lot of in-house data on what teaching methods work for different populations, and we’ll be in a much better position to educate and graduate students.”

Bob Olin
Dean of Arts and Science,
The University of Alabama

Practice #5: Tenure Review Assessment Dossiers

To reinforce the importance Alabama places on learning assessment, junior faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences are required to submit an annual report that details their assessment activities for the courses they teach and explains how they have modified their courses and instruction in response to assessment results. Initially, the quality of these reports varied; some faculty included well-defined outcomes and multiple assessment measures, while others “mailed it in.” (Fig. 2.17) To facilitate accountability and send a message that assessment activities are not optional, the dean appointed an assessment officer charged with reviewing each report and providing feedback not only to faculty members but also to department chairs and deans about individual faculty members’ performance on assessment duties.

Case in Brief



*College of Arts and Sciences
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, Alabama*

- Junior faculty members submit annual report to assessment officer within College of Arts and Sciences describing assessment activities, results, and related actions taken for each course
- Report focuses on use of direct measures and actions taken in response to data
- Assessment officer reviews plans and provides feedback when incomplete or substandard

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Elements of University of Alabama Assessment Annual Report

Fig. 2.17

Example of “Assessing in Good Faith”

Student Learning Outcomes	Active or Collaborative Learning Strategies	Direct Assessment Measures	Indirect Assessment Measures	Results	Actions Taken
The student will be able to synthesize information from several sources to draw conclusions about historical events	Group project—students analyze primary documents to create a digital presentation explaining what a chosen event (sinking of Titanic, Berlin Airlift, etc.) meant given historical context and assessing the event’s historical significance	• Group project • Course-embedded assessment—selected items on final exam	• Selected items on end-of-semester survey • Group evaluation form	Direct: Significant differences in mean final score on selected items vs. previous term (76% current term, 61% previous term)	• Extend group project assignment • Incorporate writing exercise as in-class assignment

Example of “Mailing It In”

Student Learning Outcomes	Active or Collaborative Learning Strategies	Direct Assessment Measures	Indirect Assessment Measures	Results	Actions Taken
Students gain a broad understanding of historical events in American civilization since 1865	In-class work	• Final exam • Papers • In-class work	• Student course evaluations • Group evaluation form	Outcomes largely achieved	Keep overall course format but continue to revise

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Sample Assessment Feedback

Fig. 2.18

LETTER OF REVIEW 

Research
•
•

Service
•
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Teaching
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Assessment
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Assessment

- The Associate Professor did not employ any direct measures to assess the learning outcomes of students in her courses.
- She also did not make any revisions in the content or pedagogy of Biology 201 as a result of assessment data.
- Associate Professor is advised to pay greater attention to the assessment of student learning in the courses that she teaches.

In addition, engagement with assessment is now a criterion in the teaching section of the annual review letters that become part of the tenure dossier.

(Fig. 2.18) When warranted, letters cite the absence of good faith efforts to assess and respond to learning outcomes and urge greater effort in these areas. While assessment is not considered decisive or even a major tenure criteria, the signal value of this process strongly reinforces a culture focused on student learning.

Huge Signal Value

"We've recently cited assessment in a couple of tenure review letters—believe me, it doesn't take many for word to get out to faculty that assessment of student learning is something that we're monitoring."

Bob Olin
Dean of Arts and Science,
The University of Alabama

Practice #6: General Education Eligibility Recertification

Avoiding Death by Committee

The Council found several instances of universities using planned core curriculum revision as an occasion to define general education outcomes and introduce assessment processes. Achieving these goals, however, requires meeting a substantial challenge: structuring the governance process to minimize turf wars and prevent “death by committee.” Interviewees reported that committee discussions can quickly become politically charged, as departments fear the high cost of course revision and the potential loss of general education status. It is not uncommon for universities to abandon efforts to reform the general education curriculum because no consensus could be reached on outcomes content or measurement. Simply put, this effort is often just too hard for universities to do from above, and regional accreditation is an insufficiently galvanizing event to motivate faculty and staff to do the difficult and politically fraught work of redefining general education outcomes and curriculum.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers a more promising approach to modernizing the general education curriculum. UNC’s general education reform efforts are notable both for the strategic committee process used to come to consensus on general education outcomes and for the incentive mechanism that the university employed to encourage faculty to update their course syllabi to reflect modern learning goals and to map their courses to these outcomes.

Modernizing the General Education Curriculum

UNC’s general education modernization process was an exceptionally comprehensive initiative that spanned more than 10 years. (Fig. 2.19) The initiative was triggered by a 1995 accreditation self-study which coincided with UNC’s planned 20-year curriculum review. In the self-study, UNC surveyed undergraduate students and faculty on perceptions of the institution’s general education curriculum. Results revealed that undergraduates found the curriculum complicated and saw little connection between their courses and general education requirements. According to the survey, faculty also found the goals and requirements of the general education curriculum unclear. Additionally,

Case in Brief



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

*The University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, North Carolina*

- Review of 1980 curriculum illustrates need to define “modern” learning goals
- Self-study reveals: faculty unclear about learning goals, students unsure of which courses satisfy goal requirements, courses not designed to achieve learning goals
- Internal climate survey calls for comprehensive review of general education curriculum
- Student, faculty and alumni feedback inform new learning outcomes framework

faculty felt that general education courses too often were not leading students to develop basic skills or adequate preparation for upper-level courses and that there was a need to update the curriculum to address contemporary issues such as globalization and diversity. Prompted by the conclusions of the self-study, UNC then conducted an internal climate survey that corroborated the self-study’s findings and also indicated the need for students to be engaged more in active or experiential forms of learning throughout the curriculum.

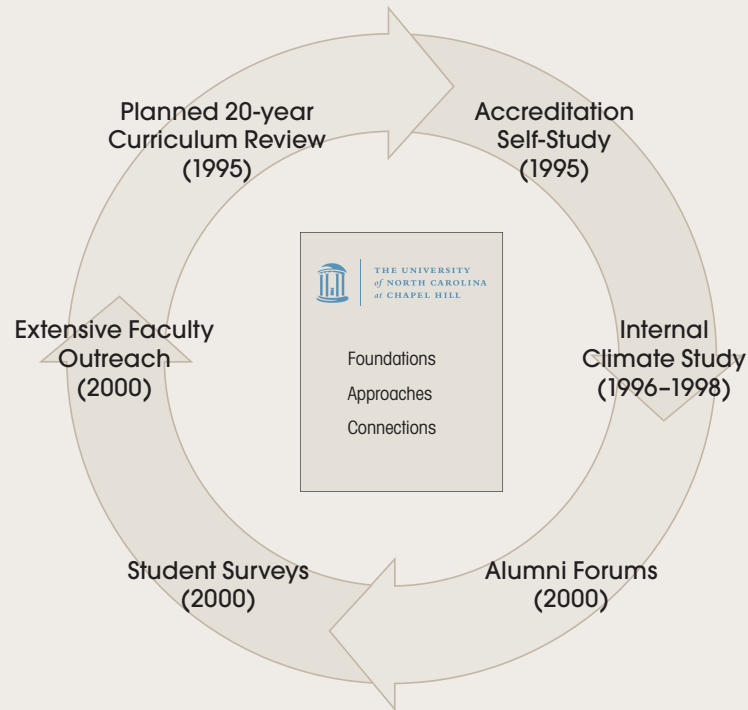
Many Hands, Light Work

Understanding that the institution’s approach to curricular reform would need to strike a balance between including faculty in the conversations and making efficient progress, UNC employed a two-tier committee structure to define general education goals for the institution and then translate these outcomes into curricular requirements. First, UNC created an Undergraduate Curriculum Review Committee or “Steering Committee.” Comprised of 14 faculty members and two students, this committee met for five hours per month for three years and ultimately established the goals of the new general education curriculum.

The university’s careful choice of steering committee members and the committee chair proved crucial to

Timeline of UNC-Chapel Hill's General Education Reform Initiative

Fig. 2.19



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

the reform initiative's ultimate success. By offering a teaching load reduction, the university was able to persuade a well-respected senior faculty member from the physics department known as a skilled consensus builder to assume the role of chair. The remaining faculty members of the committee were chosen to avoid politically unwise concentrations of power and ensure a broad representation of disciplines. To elevate the committee's standing, appointments were made directly by the dean of the college of arts and sciences and extended only to well respected senior faculty.

The steering committee began its work by using forums and surveys to gather input from students, faculty, and alumni on what a college graduate in the twenty-first century would need to know to become a well informed and productive citizen and employee. Distilling the findings from these surveys and conversations, the steering committee identified 16 curricular goals spanning three areas: "foundations," or basic skills that facilitate future learning; "approaches," or broad experiences with the methods and results of commonly employed approaches to knowledge; and "connections," or the

ability to integrate approaches to knowledge in ways that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries. The new curriculum would require students to take multiple courses from each of these three categories to satisfy general education requirements. (Fig. 2.20)

Minimizing Turf Wars

The work of defining criteria under which individual courses would qualify for inclusion in the new general education curriculum was left to 16 satellite committees, each of which focused on one goal of the curriculum and included five to ten faculty members who met for two to three hours per month for three years. Each satellite committee's work was intentionally narrow. They were not to evaluate individual courses. Rather, their task was to produce a written statement outlining what features a course must have to satisfy each aspect of the new curriculum. To satisfy the general education requirements for quantitative reasoning, for example, a course must "focus on mathematics, data analysis, statistics, computing, probability, or modeling." To fulfill requirements for

Committees' Role Limited to Defining General Education Criteria

Fig. 2.20

Steering Committee



- 14 faculty, two students
- Chairperson allowed reduced teaching load
- Five hours per month over three years

Satellite Committees

Foundations

- ✿ Foreign Language
- ✿ Health, Wellness and Physical Activity
- ✿ Quantitative Reasoning
- ✿ Critical Thinking and Research Skills
- ✿ Written and Oral Communications

Approaches

- ✿ Historical Analysis
- ✿ Philosophical Analysis and Moral Reasoning
- ✿ Natural Sciences
- ✿ Social and Behavioral Sciences
- ✿ Visual, Performing and Literary Arts

Connections

- ✿ General Education and Study in Depth
- ✿ Capstone Experiences
- ✿ Global Citizenship
- ✿ Interdisciplinary Study
- ✿ Pathways
- ✿ U.S. Diversity

- 150 faculty involved
- 2–3 hours per month over three years

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

U.S. diversity, a course must “systematically explore the perspectives/experiences of at least two U.S. groups or subcultures.”

The work of UNC’s satellite committees proceeded smoothly in large part because the university avoided the problematic committee structure that often sabotages general education reform. At most institutions, committees charged with (re)defining a general education outcome are chaired by the “natural owner” of that outcome—an English professor would chair the committee on written communication, for example. As an engineering professor might have quite different views than an English professor about what constitutes productive writing, this governance structure often produces unproductive deliberation that paralyzes the committee’s efforts.

UNC, by contrast, appointed committee chairs from departments that were “consumers” rather than “owners” of the particular outcome. Therefore, a history professor, rather than an English professor, chaired the committee on written communication. Each satellite committee included at least one “expert practitioner” (an English professor served

on the written communication committee), but the remaining members were chosen to represent a represented a balance of disciplines and interests. Committees also included at least one “intelligent outsider” (such as a physics professor on the written communication committee) to ensure that committee decisions were appropriate for all students, regardless of major. These checks and balances minimized turf wars and enabled the committee to generate practical criteria for competencies in abstract achievement areas.

“Civilian Control of the Military”

“It’s the same principle as civilian control of the military. You certainly want the natural owner of a skill set represented, but we’ve found it works better when faculty whose courses utilize the skill without expressly teaching it really help make competency definitions practical.”

Peter Ewell
National Center for
Higher Education Management

Mapping Institutional Objectives to Courses

After the goals of the new curriculum were defined, all general education courses had to be recertified as meeting the new curriculum's goals. Faculty who taught courses previously certified as meeting general education requirements were required to submit to the administrative board of the College of Arts and Sciences an updated course syllabus and a written statement explaining how the course met the criteria for the learning outcomes as defined by the satellite committees. (New courses not previous holding gen ed status could also be submitted for consideration.) Using those same criteria, 20 selection committees then reviewed faculty applications for general education recertification. To expedite the review process, each committee had responsibility for evaluating compliance with only one or two criteria. Of the 4,000 courses submitted in the first round of consideration for inclusion in the new general education curriculum, approximately 2,000 were approved. Faculty whose courses were not approved had the option of resubmitting their courses after changing the syllabus.

A Foundation for Robust Assessment

Another positive effect of UNC's work to modernize the general education curriculum is that the exercise has provided the institution with unprecedented opportunities for analysis of student achievement and curricular effectiveness. At present, UNC is

The Spade Work of "Intentionality"

"The precision and range of the new analyses we can do now that we've mapped the curriculum is exciting. We'll know what exposure students are getting where to which outcomes—this is really the spade work for the 'intentionality' you read so much about."

Dr. Lynn Williford
Director of Assessment,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

tracking the progress of a cohort of 500 students who matriculated in the fall of 2006, when the new curriculum was implemented for first-year students. These students are participating in periodic focus groups and surveys that inform the administration about student perceptions of the new requirements. Senior-year transcript analysis and testing of this cohort will allow UNC to compare the outcomes attainment of students who experienced the new general education curriculum against that of a control group of students who matriculated prior to 2006. In addition, the new system will also allow the university to compare student time-to-degree in the new and old curricula, to forecast demand for general education courses more precisely, and to uncover unintended bottlenecks in curriculum paths that are keeping students from fulfilling the new graduation requirements.

Key Principles: Incenting General Education Reform

- Focus cultural shift on early-career faculty and high-enrollment introductory courses
- Ensure that assessment training workshops culminate in concrete deliverable
- Provide visible incentives—cash, merit review, tenure criteria—for junior faculty to embrace assessment
- Conduct comprehensive review of general education to ensure that learning outcomes are in fact mapped to courses in the curriculum
- Employ "Consumer-Expert-Practitioner" models in outcomes definition process
- Consider periodic recertification of general education status to reduce "outcomes drift"



IV. Evidence-Based Funding

University requires assessment evidence as predicate for departments to justify funding requests for teaching and learning improvements

#7 Outcomes-Centric Budgeting

#8 Outcomes-Centric Fundraising Prioritization

Practice #7: Outcomes-Centric Budgeting

Explicitly Linking Outcomes to Department Resource Requests

The College of William and Mary has been at the forefront of measuring student learning for some time, due in large part to Virginia state requirements for assessment reporting that have been in place since the late 1990s. In 2004, William and Mary's Planning and Budgeting Committee (chaired by the Provost, the Vice President of Finance, and the Vice President of Administration) decided to take evidence-based decision making at the institution a step further by establishing a process by which administrators would use learning assessment data to inform decisions about resource allocation in addition to pedagogical and curricular improvements.

In 2007, William and Mary began requiring deans to

defend all new funding requests by explaining how the proposed initiative will improve student learning outcomes. Through a request form that is submitted online, deans list the program-level learning outcomes that the initiative will address and describe how department faculty plan to evaluate the impact of the initiative on the intended learning outcomes, should they receive funding. (Fig. 2.21) The form also gives deans an opportunity to upload supporting data files that demonstrate the need for additional resources through current learning outcomes results.

Whereas "management by anecdote" or "management by eloquence" is often the norm in higher education, William and Mary's goal is to build a culture of "management by data," with faculty, chairs, and deans embracing rigorous assessment as a means of securing funding.

William and Mary's Online Budget Request Form

Fig. 2.21

W&M

Department of Literary and Cultural Studies

- ① Program learning outcome(s) addressed by budget initiative
 The student will be able to describe and employ several methodologies for studying culture...
- ② Description of funding request
 Funds for development of 2-credit research experience for Literary and Cultural Studies majors
- ③ Evaluation Plan
 Department will evaluate the extent to which request led to intended outcome...
- ④ Upload support files (detailed description, charts, tables, etc.)
 evidence.doc **Browse**

Outcomes Language
Cut and paste from database of program learning objectives

Assessment Data
Form also provides ability to upload evidence

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

A Gathering Culture of Evidence

Though William and Mary is currently in the initial phase of building a culture of evidence, the Planning and Budgeting Committee anticipates that requiring budget requests now will enable further analyses and continuous pedagogical improvement in the future.

(Fig. 2.22) In the program's initial year (2007–2008), William and Mary began compiling information on which outcomes were being targeted by departmental initiatives. The Planning and Budgeting Committee

anticipates that by the third year of the program it will have collected enough data to determine how targeted learning outcomes have changed as a result of funded initiatives and whether funds were spent as promised. By year five, the institution hopes to have gathered sufficient outcomes data to determine best practices that can be adopted by other departments, to identify which departments are best stewards of funding, and to uncover initiatives that are so widely applicable that they merit being centralized into a teaching and learning shared services model.

Out-Year Analyses Enabled with Outcomes-Based Budgeting (Illustrative)

Fig. 2.22

Introduction	Year 3	Year 5	
<i>What outcomes do we want to initiate or improve and how?</i>	<i>In what ways did outcome change?</i>	<i>Best practice for other departments</i>	Data for Continuous Pedagogical Improvement
	<i>Were funds spent as proposed?</i>	<i>Best stewards of resources</i>	
		<i>Opportunities for teaching and learning shared services</i>	

Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Practice #8: Outcomes-Centric Fundraising Prioritization

Linking Assessment and Long-Term Planning

Widener University is also employing a practice that links funding decisions to student learning outcomes data. The university is bringing outcomes evidence to bear when determining the institution's greatest fundraising needs. Over the last four years Widener has coupled its strategic planning and accreditation documentation efforts, explicitly integrating learning outcomes results into key decision points. This process began in 2004, when Widener underwent a university-wide restructuring that combined many organizational structures, merging academic affairs and student affairs into a new office of the provost. Building on this restructuring effort, Widener then launched "Vision 2015," a strategic plan focused on the systematic convergence of budgeting and resource allocation, assessment, and campaign fundraising activities.

Widener was able to leverage its restructuring and strategic planning work to focus and streamline its 2007 Middle States reaccreditation. When Provost Jo Allen arrived at Widener in 2004, just

as Widener began preparing for its 2007 Middle States reaccreditation, she realized that much of the preparation required for reaccreditation was very similar to the work that Widener had just completed in writing and approving the strategic plan. Concerned that one of her first acts as Provost was going to be to ask the faculty to redo the same work from the strategic planning process, Allen and her team collaborated with Widener's accreditor, Middle States, to develop an alternative reaccreditation approach. The alternative they developed was a reaccreditation self-study that would creatively reuse Widener's strategic planning work as the backbone of Widener's reaccreditation documentation. Instead of focusing equally on all 14 Middle States standards in its self-study documentation, Widener and its Middle States liaison agreed that Widener should address the four standards that most overlapped with its strategic planning work, submitting minimal documentation for the other 10 standards.

The four Middle States standards on which Widener focused were institutional resources, institutional assessment, assessment of student learning, and planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal. These four standards represented two major themes of the institution's strategic planning efforts: 1) planning and financial stability and 2) quality. In Provost Allen's words:

Accreditation can really be boiled down to two key questions: "Does your institution have the stability to continue doing what you are doing now and what you want to do next?" and "Are the things your institution wants to do matters of great quality that will meaningfully contribute to the education of students while perhaps enhancing efficiency?" These were the questions we asked ourselves during the strategic planning process. They were the same questions that Middle States wanted us to answer through our self-study.

Concurrent with this strategic planning and reaccreditation work, Widener was also working to build a robust learning outcomes assessment infrastructure. Widener believes that this simultaneous approach helped to achieve two desirable goals. First, the university was able to reduce the documentation burden that most schools take on

Case in Brief



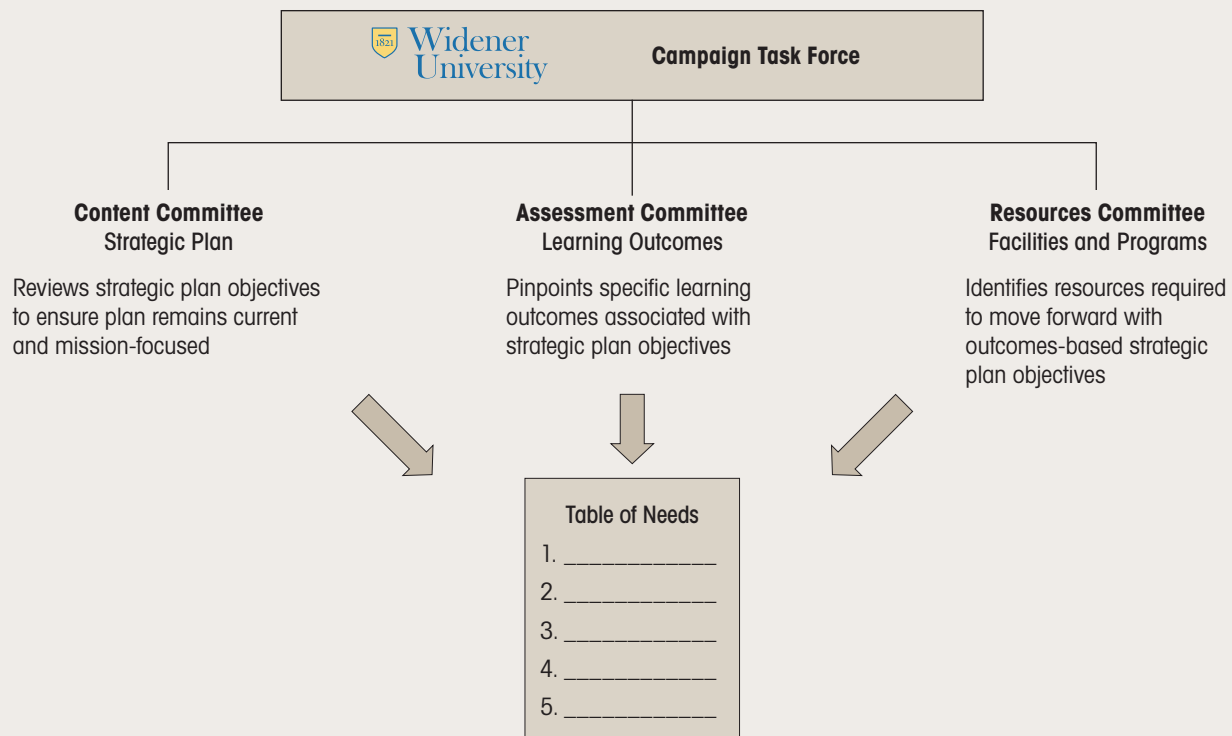
**Widener
University**

*Widener University
Chester, Pennsylvania*

- In 2004, Widener underwent a university-wide restructuring, dismantling many siloed functions; notably academic affairs and student affairs were merged into one new Office of the Provost
- Widener launched "Vision 2015," a strategic plan that focuses on the systematic convergence of reaccreditation, budgeting and resource allocation, assessment, and campaign fundraising activities
- Widener and Middle States worked closely together to ensure Vision 2015 activities could also serve Widener's reaccreditation reporting needs; Middle States agrees to this "pilot approach," largely heralded as a "gold standard"
- Provost and Widener senior administration will continue to refine the Vision 2015 plan as needed as committees and task forces apply the plan to real life decision making

Widener's Development Campaign Task Force Structure

Fig. 2.23



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

for regional reaccreditation. Second, by focusing on learning outcomes assessment planning at the same time as strategic planning and reaccreditation, Widener was able to have the processes mutually reinforce each other—the strategic plan influenced the university-wide and program outcomes that Widener defined and the assessment plan provided a guide for continually refining and updating strategic plan goals. In 2007, Widener's reaccreditation was approved with high marks by the Middle States peer

review team. The success of this effort has let Middle States to recommend Widener's reaccreditation work as example of how institutions can collaborate with accrediting bodies to develop alternative approaches to meeting accreditation requirements.

Bringing Multiple Perspectives to the Table of Needs

Widener has also used strategic planning and outcomes assessment to prioritize its fundraising needs. The university's Vision 2015 plan brings three committees—focused on content, assessment, and resources—together annually across the summer in a checks-and-balances approach to measuring progress on the strategic plan. (Fig. 2.23) Co-chaired by the provost and the senior vice president for administration and finance, these committees are currently focusing on using outcomes data as a means of prioritizing the fundraising priorities of Widener's upcoming development campaign.

Tying It All Together

"The result of this process is a thorough yearly review of the strategic plan, with learning outcomes in mind, informing how we prioritize our funding needs."

Jo Allen
Provost, Widener University

Strategic Plan Committee. The Strategic Plan Committee completes a line-by-line audit of strategic plan objectives annually to ensure that the plan remains a “live” document that is contemporary and mission-focused. This committee focuses on answering questions such as “How are we doing on this action item?,” “Does this item still make sense in today’s context?,” and “Have we overlooked something critical that should be included in the plan?”

Assessment/Accountability Committee. The Assessment/Accountability Committee suggests the appropriate student learning outcomes and/or operational assessment method for each strategic plan objective. The committee then recommends a timeline for determining if strategic plan initiatives have affected intended learning or operational outcomes. The committee focuses on answering questions such as “Do the methods of assessment make sense for the action step?” and “Are the parameters of measurement still reasonable?”

Campaign Committee: The Campaign Committee identifies the resources required to execute outcomes-based strategic plan objectives. The committee then recommends that these needs be prioritized in Widener’s development campaign, as they are tied directly to the strategic plan and student learning or operational outcomes.

Information gained from the yearly discipline of bringing these three committees together during the summer figures prominently in the 2012 Periodic Review that Widener is currently preparing for Middle States.

Data-Driven Fundraising Conversations

Beyond improving internal coherence, combining the strategic planning, assessment, and development campaign planning processes has enabled Widener

to conduct elevated, evidence-based development conversations with prospective donors by bringing learning outcomes to the table when meeting with them. This data-driven approach has especially resonated with donors from the business community, who appreciate seeing an evaluation plan explaining the current state of outcomes and how the impact of their donation on these goals will be measured. Widener posits that bringing outcomes data to donor conversations signals up-front to donors that the university will be an effective steward of their funds, ensuring that their donation is put to good use.

As anecdotal evidence of the success of this approach, Widener points to three recent gifts that the university received after discussing outcomes assessment evidence with prospective donors. (Fig. 2.24)

\$5 Million Gift for Institute Focused on Building Leadership Skills and Civic Engagement

Student learning outcomes data shows that experiential education was an effective pedagogical technique for building leadership skills. Widener shared this evidence with a prospective donor, who later donated a \$5 million gift to the institution, to be used for building a new institute that would use experiential education techniques to build student leadership skills and increase student civic engagement.

\$65,000 Gift for Simulation Equipment in Nursing School

Learning outcomes data indicates that nursing students learn proper procedures as well or better using simulation equipment, rather than practicing on real patients in actual clinical settings. With clinical settings becoming increasingly more difficult for Widener to secure for its nursing students, the university was able to leverage this data to spur a donor to fund new simulation equipment for the Nursing School.

\$125,000 Gift for Redesign of Writing Center

Widener’s early success in improving students’ writing outcomes through support from the university’s writing center, as documented in learning outcomes data, prompted a \$125,000 gift to build center capacity to serve students and faculty. As additional evidence of the impact of this approach on fundraising, Widener’s endowment has nearly tripled since 2004, a figure which the university attributes in large part to their strategic use of outcomes data in development conversations.

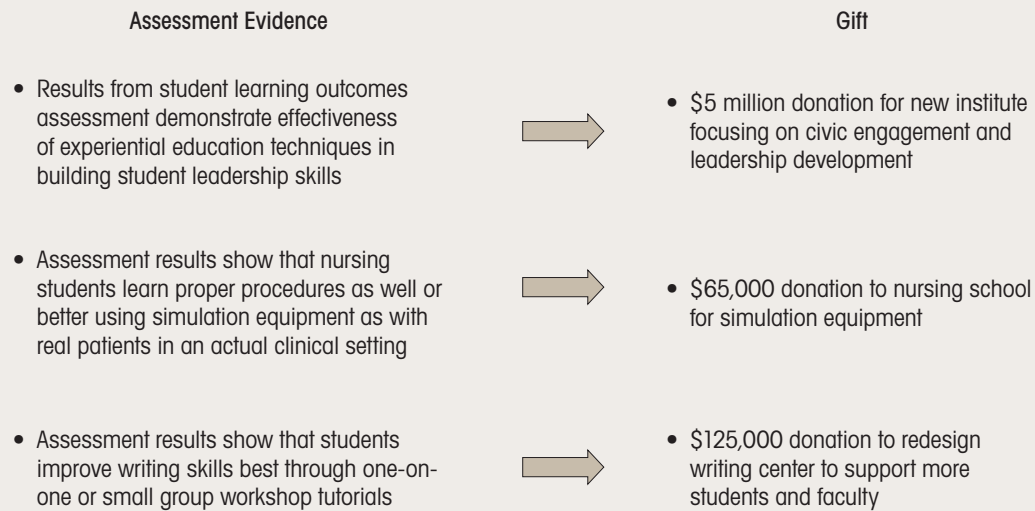
Appealing to the Head as Well as the Heart

“Widener is using assessment evidence as a driver of conversations with donors, many of whom have been impressed with our commitment to defining success and measuring our progress toward it.”

Jo Allen
Provost, Widener University

Outcomes Assessment Data Helps Secure Robust Unprecedented Gifts

Fig. 2.24



Source: University Leadership Council interviews and analysis.

Key Principles: Evidence-Based Funding

- Denominate departmental funding requests in specific, measurable learning outcomes data
- Require departments to demonstrate that requested funds are spent on promised pedagogical improvements and that results are assessed
- Include outcomes assessment across the strategic planning portfolio: budgeting, resource allocation, capital and campaign planning
- Leverage assessment evidence to seek continuous improvement funding from external sources: alumni and prospective donors



Implementation Toolkit

Roles, Responsibilities, and Investments

The Prudent Provost's Approach to Learning Outcomes Assessment

Fast-Follower on External Accountability, Sustained Supporter of Continuous Internal Improvement

I Measuring and Communicating <i>Provost</i>	II Streamlining Accreditation <i>Assessment Director</i>	III Setting Program Expectations <i>Department Chairs</i>
#1 Heed lessons from health care sector #2 Focus on "quality" really another lever on "cost"—access, retention, graduation will matter much more than value-add for foreseeable future #3 Fast-follower approach recommended; first movers incur high costs without commensurate pedagogical or institutional advantage #4 Monitor other school's experience with CLA, other standardized tests #5 Monitor meaningful changes in state funding and rankings formulas #6 Monitor emerging assessment methodology and disclosure experiments	#7 If less than three years to visit, assign FT accreditation coordinator #8 If three or more years, use automated reporting tool to standardize assessment plans and documentation #9 Triage departmental need for assessment training and support #10 Ask accreditor if institutional strategic plan can serve as accreditation document	#11 All departments articulate outcomes within three years #12 All departments employ direct assessment within three years #13 Provide "approved list" of internal and external assessment methods #14 Designate department liaison with assessment office to keep accreditation documentation current #15 Encourage department-level assessment annual reports #16 Encourage outcomes mapping for online component of coursework

IV

Mapping General Education

All Faculty

- #17 Employ “consumer-expert practitioner” model for defining outcomes
- #18 Ensure all objectives have direct measures (standardized tests measure only a handful)
- #19 Triage high-volume, low-success introductory courses for “learner-centric” redesign

V

Staffing and Infrastructure

Finance & Administration

Teaching and Learning Center

- #20 Fund 18-month project manager for inventory of internal assessment best practices
- #21 Target assessment training at junior faculty
- #22 Training culminates in “work product”—redesigned course, program outcomes, etc.
- #23 Internal consulting and vendor scanning arm for classroom technologies

Information Systems

- #24 Automated accreditation documentation
- #25 Online assessment practice database
- #26 Course-level outcomes mapping tool

Estimated Cost Range
of Best-Practice
Assessment Infrastructure:
\$100,000–\$200,000



Incentives

Provost

- #27 Require that general education courses map to institutional outcomes
- #28 Use assessment in department budgeting
- #29 Use assessment in fundraising prioritization
- #30 Consider embracing assessment as (minor) criterion in teaching component of tenure decisions
- #31 Though a difficult cultural ask, incentives are perhaps necessary to meet accreditor bar of demonstrating that assessment meaningfully informs institutional decisions

