

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SCRANTON
A JESUIT UNIVERSITY

**Comprehensive
Assessment Plan**

December 2004

The University of Scranton Comprehensive Assessment Plan

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The University of Scranton Comprehensive Assessment Plan

Introduction

The University's Comprehensive Assessment Plan replaces a plan developed in 1996 and outlines an approach to measuring institutional effectiveness through the assessment of intended outcomes developed at the instructional program and administrative/educational support unit level. It reflects the consensus of an appointed task force whose members represent a wide range of offices and departments at The University of Scranton. The plan recognizes that there are intangibles in the educational process that cannot be readily measured; nevertheless, it promotes assessment as essential to the ongoing improvement of the University.

The success of this plan rests with the individuals who will be called upon to implement it at the program/unit level. It also requires a commitment of resources on the part of the University to promote, support, and maintain on-going assessment activities.

Background

In February 2003, Dr. Marie George, Vice President, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, formed the University of Scranton Assessment Task Force made up of members from academic and administrative departments across campus. This group was charged with writing a comprehensive University Assessment Plan by December 2004. It was also asked to provide support for an educational effort aimed at increasing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of faculty and staff about the role of outcomes and assessment in promoting a learning-centered culture and ongoing institutional effectiveness. In August 2003, Mr. Jerome DeSanto succeeded Dr. George as the Vice President for Planning.

The task force held biweekly meetings, sponsored members to attend assessment related workshops, and provided regular progress reports to the Vice President for Planning. In

addition, the co-chairs of the task force informed faculty and administrative bodies of the task force's work and communicated with the University Goals Committee during the process of fashioning a list of University goals derived from the institution's mission statement.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2003, the task force researched assessment plans from other institutions and inventoried current assessment activities conducted on The University of Scranton campus. By the beginning of the fall 2003 semester, the group had developed a set of assessment principles and decided upon an assessment model.

During spring 2004, the Assessment Task Force co-chairs made presentations to the following groups:

- The Dean's Conferences of the five academic colleges
- The Student Affairs Conference
- The Academic Policy Council
- The Administrators' Conference
- The University Planning Committee
- The Expanded Leadership Group

Subsequent task force meetings focused on fine tuning the assessment plan based upon suggestions from these groups.

Context and Rationale

The University of Scranton's Assessment Plan addresses the need to evaluate overall institutional effectiveness by focusing on the measurement of intended outcomes at the program/unit level that support the University's mission and goals. It recognizes the contributions made by academic programs and administrative/educational support units, and it encourages ongoing and targeted assessment activities aimed at improving student learning and the environment for learning.

Two major factors provide the rationale for the ongoing evaluation of overall institutional effectiveness. The first is the University's character as a Jesuit university. One of the key principles of Jesuit education is "the magis", a Latin word meaning "more", which suggests a boundless desire to reach ever-higher levels of excellence and to seek the greater good in all things. The Jesuit tradition of discernment also suggests the importance of carefully reviewing the work of the University to see whether it is accomplishing the good that it has set out to achieve. Jesuit education is characterized by the willingness to examine itself and to adapt means and methods to achieve its purposes more effectively.

The second factor relates to accreditation standards expressed in the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's "Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education 2002," Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment) and Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning) call for institutions to develop and implement an assessment plan that evaluates overall effectiveness, including student learning. In its **Periodic Review Report**, submitted to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education on June 30, 2003, the University committed itself to replacing the current assessment plan by the end of 2004 in order to comply with the new standards.

Assessment Principles

A number of general principles emerged from task force discussions and from the University community at large. These are listed below:

- 1. Assessment involves gathering and analyzing data for the purpose of making decisions for the improvement of educational programs and support services.**

The primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning and administrative and educational support services. Assessment is more than just counting the number of participants, events, or survey responses. It involves determining if a satisfactory level of learning or functioning has occurred, identifying factors that account for the results, and suggesting strategies that lead to improvement.

- 2. Assessment is about programs and services, not individuals.**

Assessment measures and results should focus on improving programs and services. Results are not to be used for individual performance evaluation.

- 3. Assessment results inform planning and resource allocation.**

Consideration of assessment results will be incorporated into decision-making regarding the most effective and efficient use of University resources.

- 4. Assessment activities are performed in a continuous cycle.**

Assessment is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end – improvement of student learning and of services provided by administrative and educational support units. Assessment is an evolutionary process that has the potential to be more systematic and comprehensive over time.

- 5. The design, implementation, and operation of most assessment activities reside at the program/unit level; however, there remains a role for University-wide assessment activities.**

Instructional programs and administrative and educational support units have primary responsibility for developing intended outcomes that support The University of Scranton's mission and goals, determining the means of assessment and criteria for success, analyzing assessment results, and implementing improvement strategies. Institutional data and University-wide assessment that relate to the activities of multiple programs or units are valuable resources. The Planning, Assessment & Institutional Research Office and other departments on campus collect and store data from University-wide assessment activities. These offices promote campus-wide awareness of available data and implement strategies to disseminate this data.

- 6. Effective assessment uses multiple methods.**

Best practices in assessment indicate that using two or more methods of assessment for each intended outcome is preferable to a single method.

- 7. Support and recognition of assessment endeavors are necessary to achieve the purposes of the plan.**

By recognizing assessment endeavors and providing resources for training and development, the University encourages fuller participation in assessment activities.

- 8. The assessment process requires ongoing review.**

Ongoing review assures that the assessment process will remain responsive to the needs of the University community.

The Assessment Process

Assessment of **instructional programs*** and **administrative and educational support units** answers the following questions:

- What outcomes do we expect to achieve?
- How do these outcomes relate to the University's mission and/or goals?
- Which **intended outcomes** should we assess during the current assessment cycle?
- Which means of assessment will we use to determine if the outcomes are being achieved?
- What result(s) would indicate a satisfactory level of accomplishment?
- How will we use the assessment results to improve our program/service?

In summary, the assessment process involves creating a list of intended outcomes that relate to the University's mission and goals, selecting a limited number of intended outcomes for close scrutiny during each assessment cycle, determining methods to assess these outcomes, establishing criteria for success, and using the results of assessment for improvement purposes. Each of these steps is described in greater detail below.

Identifying Intended Outcomes

Every instructional program and administrative/educational support unit will develop a complete list of intended outcomes. There are two types of intended outcomes — **student learning outcomes** and **administrative outcomes**. Instructional programs assess student learning outcomes exclusively. These express what the graduates or students are expected to know, think, or do when they have completed their program. Administrative units, because they mainly provide essential services to the institution and are not involved directly in instruction, typically write outcomes that are process-oriented. These relate to how well the unit intends to function and they make reference to the quantity of work performed, the efficiency with which a function operates, compliance with recognized standards, or client satisfaction. Educational support units contribute directly to student learning and provide essential services. As a result, their intended outcomes are

* See glossary for definitions of boldfaced terms.

a mix of student learning and administrative outcomes. The number of intended outcomes will depend on the nature of the program or unit.

Relating Intended Outcomes to the University's Mission and Goals

The second step of the assessment process requires each program or unit to demonstrate the relationship between their intended outcomes and the University's Mission and Goals. This relationship can be stated directly or programs/units may use their own mission statement as an intermediary step. Intended outcomes would then be related to the University Mission and Goals through the program/unit mission statement.

Selecting Intended Outcomes to be Assessed

From the complete list of its intended outcomes, programs and units identify a limited number (3-5) to assess in an annual assessment cycle. Programs and units select those outcomes where it is likely that improvements may be needed.

Determining Means of Assessment

Means of assessment may be **qualitative** or **quantitative**, **direct** or **indirect**, **locally developed** or **commercially developed**. Wherever possible, existing methods, measures, and data sources should be used. Selecting two or more measures per intended outcome increases the reliability of the results.

Establishing Criteria for Success

Once the means of assessment have been determined, programs and units will establish specific criteria for success. Where possible, established discipline or professional benchmarks should be used to identify the criteria for success.

Using Assessment Results to Improve Programs/Services

Programs/units will review assessment results, compare them to the established criteria for success, and determine if improvements are necessary. Proposed improvements need to be documented, implemented, and assessed for their effectiveness.

Implementing the Assessment Plan

Each instructional program or administrative and educational support unit identified by their division head is responsible for developing and implementing an assessment plan consistent with the guidelines established in this comprehensive assessment plan. A program or unit's plan should encourage a sense of ownership and participation by seeking input from its constituents in terms of identifying intended outcomes, the means for measuring these outcomes, establishing specific criteria upon which to determine success, and proposing actions to improve effectiveness.

The following section discusses some of the practical issues related to implementing the assessment plan at the program and unit level. The recommendations provided may not apply to all programs and units equally but they are consistent with principles already presented. A sample plan is included in Appendix 3.

Assessment Plan Outline

The Assessment Plan for each program/unit should contain the following elements:

- Assessment Coordinator (usually the program/unit head)
- Relationship of the program/unit to the University Mission and Goals
 - Program/unit mission statement (if applicable)
- Complete list of program/unit intended outcomes
- Assessment Cycle - indicate time frame for completion of:
 - Assessment of selected outcomes
 - Analysis and report of results
 - Implementation of improvements indicated by assessment results
- Selected outcomes for assessment in current cycle
- Means of assessment
- Criteria for success

Reporting Assessment Activities & Results

Annual Updates

Program/Unit plans that have a cycle of more than one year will produce an Annual Update on their assessment plan. Assessment projects, results, and the discussion of them with program/unit personnel and supervisors will be reported in each program/unit's Annual Report. Items that should be included in the annual reporting of assessment are:

- Assessments in progress
- Assessments completed
- Results of completed assessments
- Recommended improvements on the basis of results
- Requests for additional resources (if needed) to implement improvements
- Improvement strategies implemented

Final Reports

Each program/unit will prepare a final report for its Division Head/Dean when it reaches the end of its assessment plan cycle. The report should include the following elements:

- Assessment Cycle
- Selected Outcomes
- Link to Mission and Goals
- For each selected outcome:
 - Means of assessment (there may be several means used to assess each outcome)
 - Summary of assessment data collected
 - Use of results to improve programs

Roles & Responsibilities

The primary responsibility for the design and implementation of assessment plans rests with the personnel assigned to the program/unit and their division heads. The Planning, Assessment & Institutional Research Office (PAIRO) plays a supportive and/or consultative role.

Division Head/Dean

- Identify program/units that will be responsible for developing assessment plans (Several smaller program/units may develop a combined assessment plan.)
- Determine appropriate timeframes for assessment cycles of various programs/units
- Review assessment plans and reports for completeness and compliance with guidelines
- Incorporate assessment results into planning and resource allocation processes

Program/Unit Head

The major responsibilities of the program/unit head or assessment coordinator (where appropriate) will be to:

- Serve as the main contact between the program/unit and PAIRO in matters related to assessment
- Organize efforts to implement assessment activities and collect data
- Participate in assessment training opportunities
- Lead discussions among constituents that promote the development of intended outcomes, means of assessment, and criteria for success
- Prepare, with the assistance of colleagues, the program/unit's assessment plan and submit it to the division head/dean for review and approval
- Discuss the results of assessment with constituents and formulate improvement strategies
- Document and report assessment results and improvement strategies to the division head/dean

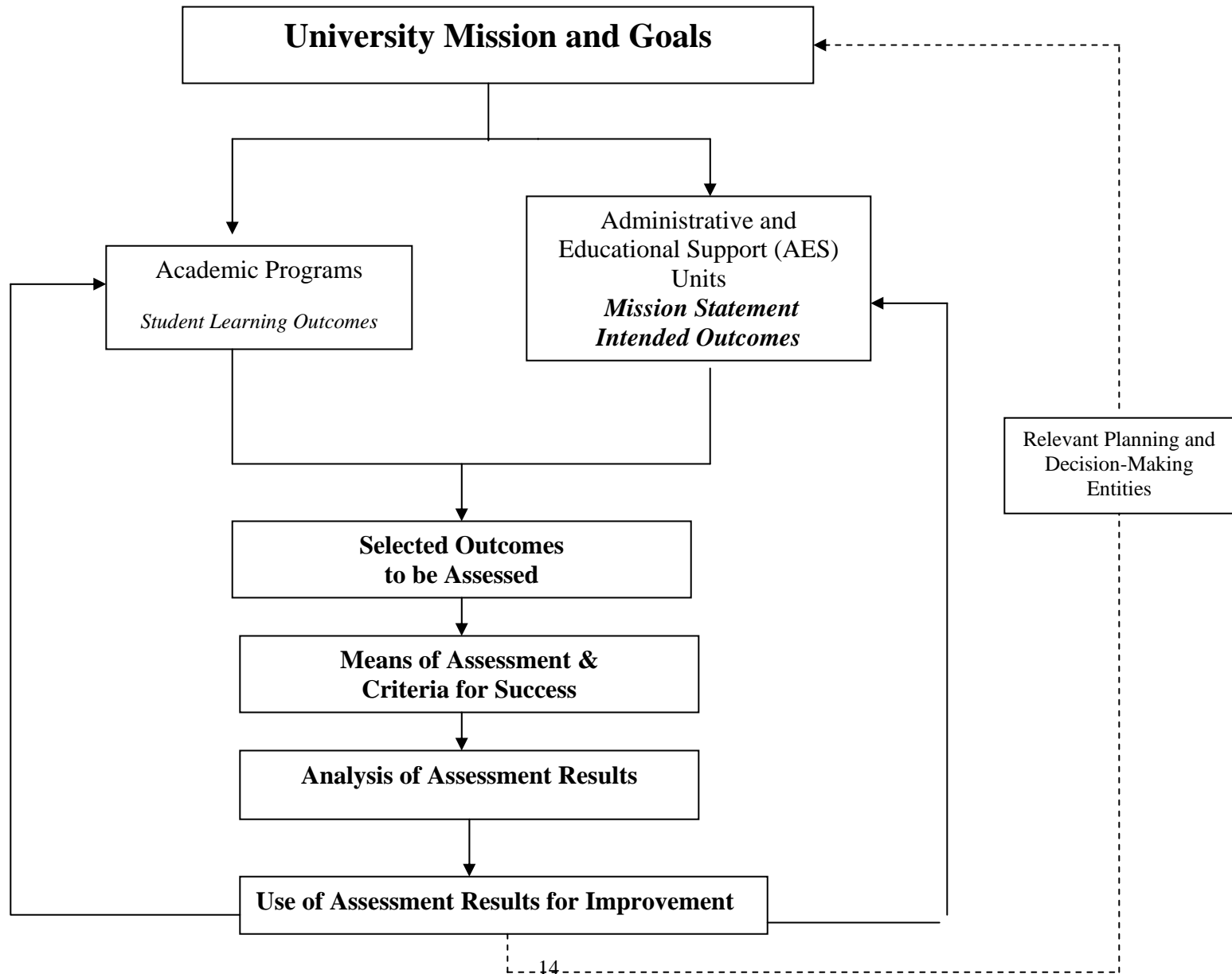
Role of Planning, Assessment & Institutional Research Office

- Conduct selected University-wide assessment and make results available for use by relevant programs/units
- Act as a consultant for various constituencies within the University on elements of the assessment process
- Coordinate training opportunities
- Monitor assessment reports and plans
- Collect and store the University's assessment plans and results

Appendices

1. Assessment Process Flow Chart
2. Glossary
3. Sample Program/Unit Assessment Plan
4. Implementation Timeline
5. Summary of Assessment Inventory
6. Assessment Task Force Membership

Appendix 1 – Assessment Process Flowchart



Appendix 2 – Assessment Plan Glossary of Terms

Administrative Units – Departments or offices that provide services that maintain the institution and are essential to its operations but do not impact directly the institution’s instructional programs. Examples include: Registrar, Financial Aid, Development

Assessment – A set of activities designed and implemented to measure selected outcomes with the goal of improvement.

Means of Assessment

Qualitative Assessment - Any inquiry process designed to increase understanding of a social or human problem through building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. Such approaches do not yield scores but rather information that can be used to make overall judgments about the attainment of the stated outcomes. Qualitative approaches may utilize unobtrusive observations of students, unstructured interviews, content analysis of historical documents, analysis of autobiographies or journals, and holistic judgments of student performances or products, such as oral presentations or writing samples.

Quantitative Assessment – An inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true.

Direct Assessment - Direct measures of student learning require students to display their knowledge and skills as they respond to the instrument itself. Direct assessment involves looking at actual samples of work produced by students, programs, or units. Objective tests, essays, presentations, and classroom assignments all meet this criterion

Indirect Assessment – A process of gathering information through means other than looking at actual samples of work produced by students, programs, or units. Indirect methods such as surveys and interviews ask students or clients to reflect on their experience rather than to demonstrate it. Such methods require that assessors infer actual student or client abilities, knowledge, and values rather than observe direct evidence. Among indirect methods are surveys, exit interviews, focus groups, and the use of external reviewers.

Locally Developed Instrument - Objective and/or subjective tests or surveys designed by faculty or staff of the program/unit.

Commercially Developed Instrument - Group administered, mostly or entirely multiple-choice, "objective" tests or surveys which focus on one or more program/unit areas. Results are based on comparison with a reference or *norm* group. Typically must be purchased from a private vendor.

Course-embedded assessment - Methods of assessing student learning within the classroom environment, using course goals, objectives and content to gauge the extent of the learning that is taking place. Questions intended to assess outcomes goals for the major are incorporated into exams or other assignments. Evaluation of the responses is conducted at

the 'course level' (ex. 90% of students in all sections of HIST101 will answer Question A correctly).

Educational Support Units – departments or offices which are not primarily instructional in nature, but do contribute directly to student learning or instruction. Examples include: Career Services, academic advising centers, Library services

Instructional Program - A combination of courses and related activities organized for the attainment of broad educational objectives (NCES definition). The University's instructional programs include any valid major in which students can earn a degree; any combination of courses that lead to special student designations such as honors programs, interdisciplinary programs, concentrations, and others as outlined in the University catalogs and appearing on an official University of Scranton transcript; and the General Education Curriculum as outlined in the University's *Undergraduate Catalog*.

Outcomes

Intended Outcomes - Statements that articulate the ideal results expected from accomplishing goals derived from the University's mission.

Administrative Outcomes – Intended outcomes for administrative units and educational support units that relate to how well the unit intends to function and reference one or more of the following: quantity of work performed, efficiency with which a function operates, compliance with recognized standards, or client satisfaction.

Student Learning Outcomes - Intended outcomes for instructional programs and educational support units comprised of student learning statements that describe what students should be able to know, think, or do upon completion of the program.

Student Outcomes – measures of the University's overall performance related to student processes, such as freshman retention rates, graduation rates, and placement rates.

University Goals – A reasonably static, overarching set of emblematic characteristics, informed by the University's mission, that help define the University's purpose and distinctive values.

Appendix 3 – Sample Program/Unit Assessment Plan

Career Services Assessment Plan August 2004

A. Assessment Coordinator: Paul Perhach, Director, Career Services
Telephone: 941-7640 Email: Perhachp1@scranton.edu

B. Relationship of Unit to University Mission/Goals

University Mission

The University's mission states, in part, "...The University is dedicated to freedom of inquiry, the pursuit of wisdom, integrity, and truth, the personal growth and development of all who share in its life and ministry."

Related University Goals

Provide educational opportunities and support programs that promote the mission of the University, meet the needs and interests of traditional and non-traditional students, and serve the needs of the local region.

Impart to students the importance of gathering, evaluating, disseminating, and applying information using traditional and contemporary methods.

Provide learning experiences that reach beyond the fundamental acquisition of knowledge to include understanding interactions and syntheses through discussion, critical thinking, and application.

C. Unit Mission Statement

The University of Scranton Career Services office strives to facilitate the process of career choice by helping students focus on a personal sense of meaning and career direction consistent with their unique talents, aspirations, and vision for living. Career Services staff members are guided by the principles of Jesuit education and seek to impart knowledge that has immediate and long-term value.

D. Intended Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will conduct effective job searches
- Students will investigate career options in a focused way
- Students will develop confidence in employment interviews
- Students will demonstrate effective ways to correspond with employers

- Students will demonstrate acceptable professional behavior in their interactions with employers
- Freshmen will be familiar with the resources available through Career Services

Administrative Outcomes

- Students who have contact with Career Services will express a high degree of satisfaction with the experience
- Employers who participate in Career Services events will express a high degree of satisfaction with the experience(s)
- An appropriate number of students from all undergraduate majors and graduate programs will be represented in the total number of student contacts by office staff.
- A significant number of undergraduate seniors will be represented in the total number of student contacts by office staff
- A significant number of students will register their career interests via the web-based System
- A sufficient number of workshops, appropriate to the needs of students, will be offered by Career Services
- An appropriate number of job offers will result from campus recruiting interviews
- A significant number of students who register with the web-based system will upload their resumes

E. Assessment Cycle

Career Services assessment activities will follow a twelve-month cycle, selecting 2-4 intended outcomes per year with the intent to assess all outcomes within five years.

August-November: Identify selected intended outcomes, means of assessment, and criteria for success for the current year

September-May: Implement improvement strategies based on previous year's assessment results

December-April: Conduct current year assessment activities

May-July: Discuss results of current year assessment and agree upon improvement strategies

June-July: Review and report on results of improvement strategies from previous year.

Appendix 4 - Implementation Timeline

Fall 2004:

- University Assessment Plan completed, reviewed and approved
- Model programs develop assessment plans
 - Development Office
 - Academic Advising

- Identify 9 to 12 pilot programs to develop assessment plans in Spring 2005
- Provide training for pilot program assessment coordinators

Spring 2005

- Model programs/units implement assessment plans
- Pilot programs/units develop assessment plans
- Identify and provide training for assessment coordinators for all programs/units.

Academic Year 2005-2006

- Initial report from model departments/units
- Pilot programs/units implement assessment plans
- All programs/units develop assessment plans

Academic Year 2006-2007

- Initial reports from pilot plans
- Implementation of assessment plans for all programs/units

Academic Year 2007-2008

- Review institutional plan as part of Middle States Self-Study

Appendix 5 – Summary of Assessment Inventory

During the spring 2003 semester, members of the Assessment Task Force conducted an inventory of the assessment activities that were currently taking place in the academic and administrative departments at the University. A summary of the information collected is presented here. A more detailed listing of the departments' assessment activities is available in the Planning, Assessment & Institutional Research Office.

- 48 academic and administrative departments reported conducting assessment activities on a regular basis
- 188 total assessment activities were reported

The types of assessment activities conducted were categorized by the task force. They appear below in order of the frequency of their use.

- Tracking activities (23%)
- Attitudinal surveys (11%)
- Satisfaction surveys (11%)
- Benchmarking (8%)
- Standardized testing (7%)
- Employer feedback (6%)
- Audits (5%)
- Exit Survey/Interview (5%)
- Other Surveys (3%)
- Post-graduate Placement (2%)
- Other activities (19%)

Note: these figures do not include the centralized assessment activities conducted by the Planning, Assessment & Institutional Research Office

Appendix 6 – Assessment Task Force Membership 2003-04

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|--------------------------------|---|
| Brigid Frein, Ph.D., Co-Chair | College of Arts and Science |
| Paul Perhach, Co-Chair | Student Affairs Division |
| James Boyle | Finance/Treasurer Division |
| Debra Busacco, Ph.D. | Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence |
| Barbara Cozza, Ph.D. | College of Professional Studies |
| Joseph Curran | Campus Ministry Division |
| Robyn Dickinson | Planning, Assessment & Institutional Research |
| Marian Farrell, Ph.D. | College of Professional Studies |
| Peter Galbraith | Institutional Advancement Division |
| Christie Karpiak, Ph.D. | College of Arts and Sciences |
| Charles Kratz | Academic Affairs Division |
| Hong Nguyen, Ph.D. | Kania School of Management |
| Duncan Perry, Ph.D. | Graduate School |
| Rose Sebastianelli, Ph.D. | Kania School of Management |
| Bonnie Thomas-Sharksnas, Ph.D. | Planning, Assessment & Institutional Research |

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