

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT SPRINGFIELD**

M e m o r a n d u m

To: Elaine Rundle-Schwark
Chair, Undergraduate Council

Sharron LaFollette
Chair, Graduate Council

From: Sara Cordell
Chair, Committee on Assessment of Student Learning

Date: March 24, 2009

Re: Recommendation for Academic Program Reporting on Assessment of Student Learning

In March of 2008, in recognition of the critical importance of assessment, the Campus Senate approved Resolution 37-18, which effectively established the Committee on Assessment of Student Learning (CASL) for the purpose of fostering best practices of assessment across the campus and encouraging policies, procedures, and programs to assess student learning. In keeping with that charge, CASL has reviewed the history of program-level assessment of learning outcomes at UIS and carefully considered overall progress to date.

Over the years, in addition to sponsoring and delivering professional development workshops related to academic assessment, administrators and members of the Assessment Task Force have tried a variety of approaches to gather information about programs' assessment plans and activities. Efforts to track the development of program-level assessment have largely consisted of annual requests for various forms of narrative reports or survey responses. The data collected show that the campus has made significant progress since the assessment initiative was first introduced in the 1980s. For example, 95% of UIS undergraduate programs and 79% of graduate programs responded to the 2007 Assessment Survey, and all reported evaluating program learning outcomes using some form of aggregated student data. However, survey responses also indicated that 15% of the responding undergraduate programs and 26% of the graduate programs were not summarizing or analyzing the results. Not surprisingly, survey results also indicated that programs vary considerably in the specification of learning outcomes and data collection approaches, as well as the extent to which they engage in organized use of assessment data.

In order to foster the further development of an academic culture that is attuned to the ongoing need (a) for assessment of student learning outcomes at the program level and (b) for effectively using assessment data to inform curricular decision-making, it is important that individual programs receive program-specific, developmental feedback on their assessment activities. Experience has shown that general surveys cannot provide the depth of information needed for individually-tailored developmental feedback, and requiring annual narrative reports from all programs puts an administrative burden on programs and yields an amount of data that will overwhelm CASL's ability to provide meaningful individual feedback. In lieu of these approaches, CASL members recommend that UIS now implement a formal rotating schedule for reporting and review of program assessment activities.

As you know, program-level assessment is a vital mechanism for ensuring academic quality and, accordingly, *Assessment of Learning Outcomes* is already a required section of the current *Academic Program Review Guidelines* (appropriately linked to *Curricular Revisions*). Given this intrinsic connection, we believe that the quality and effectiveness of a department's assessment activities is best evaluated in the context of academic program review conducted by Undergraduate and Graduate Councils. Thus, we further recommend that formal assessment reporting be linked to the program review schedule, so

that academic departments receive program-specific feedback and assistance in time to strengthen program assessment procedures before preparing their formal academic program review documents. More specifically, CASL proposes that academic programs be required to submit an **Assessment Status Report** to CASL in Year Three of the regular program review cycle (see the **Assessment Status Report Schedule** attached). The Report will be due no later than May 15th of that academic year. In Year Four of the academic program review cycle, CASL will review the report and provide formative written feedback and assistance to the program. Departments will be required to include CASL's feedback in their academic program review documentation.

This reporting requirement will be considered the minimum expectation. As part of the program review process, the Councils (Undergraduate and Graduate, as appropriate) may recommend, and the Provost require, that academic departments whose assessment process is identified as needing further developmental work submit additional follow-up reports on progress to CASL. Thus, the Year 3 **Assessment Status Report** will be considered the *minimum* reporting requirement within the program review cycle.

Limiting the formal reporting requirement to once per review cycle will reduce the reporting burden for departments; will allow CASL to provide focused, program-specific feedback and support; and will communicate more clearly the expectation that departments will be responsible for assessing program-level learning outcomes and for using that data to inform curricular decision-making on an ongoing basis.

The governance process for review of Assessment Status Reports would involve the following:

- Departments will submit their status reports to the college dean's office
- A college committee (curriculum or assessment-specific) will review the Assessment Status Report for clarity and provide written comment. The committee may request revisions to the report prior to forwarding a final version to the college dean.
- The dean will review the Assessment Status Report and college committee's written comments and may provide additional written comments.
- The dean will send the final Assessment Status Report and all written comments to CASL.

CASL proposes beginning this process in Academic Year 2009/10, for academic programs scheduled for self-study in 2011/12; those programs include Environmental Studies, Legal Studies, and Liberal and Integrative Studies. Thus, in AY 2009/10, these three programs would be required to prepare and submit an Assessment Activities and Status Report to CASL. Attached is a draft **Assessment Status Report** form, which we are also proposing as a required template. CASL has also developed an associated evaluation rubric that we will use to review program reports and collect data for aggregation at the campus level.

Please note that, in addition to conducting the formal review of assessment status reports, CASL will continue to develop online educational modules, deliver workshops, and provide individual consultation to departments to support their program assessment efforts and to foster best practices of assessment across the campus.

It is CASL's hope that members of the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils will find merit in this proposal to link the assessment reporting and program review schedules, and we seek your formal endorsement for doing so. Please let me know if you would like to discuss the proposal further. We have attached a draft resolution and are hoping to send the resolution and accompanying documentation to Campus Senate in time for action this spring.

UIS

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