Assessment Proposal for SUNY New Paltz

Assessment Steering Committee

November 18, 2002
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consistent with the charge put forth to the Assessment Steering Committee, this proposal identifies the underlying philosophy and principles, the pertinent organizational levels, the priorities, and the resources necessary for creating a comprehensive assessment program at SUNY New Paltz. The proposal sets forth recommendations for assessment efforts within General Education, the Academic Major & Program, and Administrative & Academic Support. The underlying philosophy is first and foremost that the assessment program must be “right” for New Paltz and therefore engage the campus at its “grassroots.” The assessment program must also meet external demands, but in a manner that promotes sustainability and makes assessment an integral part of campus life and culture.

Assessment requires that we continually gauge our progress towards creating a quality learning environment for students. The quality of the learning environment is contingent upon both academic and administrative processes. Thus, this proposal has at its core our mission to support the intellectual, social, and personal growth of our students. Although our campus mission also involves service and research, our strategic planning process emphasized its student-centered aspects. Since several departments on campus are one step removed from direct contact with students, it is intended that the assessment program assist in connecting those departments more closely to our student-centered mission.

Although this proposal was developed with broad faculty and staff representation, the schedule to which the steering committee was held did not permit time for campus-wide discussion. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that this proposal be presented to the full campus community for discussion, possible modification, and endorsement.
II. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Process
The Assessment Steering Committee has identified recommendations for formal assessment processes in the areas of Overall Responsibility, General Education, the Academic Major & Program, and Administrative & Academic Support. Full implementation will take time and must proceed in a manner that does not overwhelm faculty and staff, yet is attentive to our external audiences.

- It is recommended, following review of the proposal by the President and the Cabinet, that several focused dialogues, open to faculty and staff, be held to promote discussion and to garner important feedback.

- Assessment proposals for General Education and Academic Major & Program, given their academic nature, will require collaboration and discourse among the faculty; some aspects may best be addressed directly in governance.

B. Philosophy and Principles
- The principles and statements of philosophy that guide assessment in each area should be carefully reviewed, openly adopted, and publicly disseminated in order to set the context and lay the "ground rules" for proceeding with assessment activities.

C. Organizational Levels, Ownership, and Priorities
- Assessment Advisory Council
To ensure coordination and reporting on progress and effectiveness of the overall campus assessment effort, it is recommended that the President establish a campus-wide Assessment Advisory Council as described in Section IV.

- Assessment in General Education
Section V of this proposal vests responsibility for GE assessment with the General Education Board. The GE Board was constituted in May 2002, following approval of the GE III program. It is recommended that the GE Board develop an assessment plan for presentation to faculty governance early in the 2003 semester.

- Assessment in the Academic Major & Program
It is recommended that the President charge the Provost and the Deans with implementing an assessment process within each of the Schools, based on the guidelines set forth in Section VI. An implementation plan should be presented to the President in December 2002.

- Administrative & Academic Support Assessment
It is recommended that the President establish a short-term assessment committee to operate consistent with the philosophy, roles, responsibilities, and process recommended in Section VII. This group would facilitate and coordinate assessment efforts in these departments and divisions until the processes are fully established and self-sustaining. A plan to implement assessment in administrative and academic support areas should be presented to the President by May 2003, with initiation of an assessment process targeted for Fall 2003.
D. Resources

Near Term

- Resources committed in the upcoming year should be targeted specifically at meaningful workshop opportunities that will not only make substantive progress in each assessment area, but will also build internal capacity to offer development opportunities to our own faculty and staff. Workshops that focus on General Education, Academic Major & Program, and Administrative & Academic Support Assessment should be scheduled over the course of the next academic year.

- The implementation of assessment requires not only substantive knowledge, but also time for faculty (not just department chairs) and staff (not just directors) to develop plans and set a course of action collaboratively.

- The Teaching and Learning Center should offer workshops on course-based assessment strategies curriculum design, syllabi development, and pedagogical approaches that promote student learning.

- Institutional Research, in conjunction with Academic Computing and the Web Coordinator, should identify mechanisms for storage and retrieval of campus-wide assessment information with the aim of making this technology available in Fall 2003.

- The Assessment Advisory Council should develop a long-term proposal for assessment resource needs and present that proposal to the President and Cabinet in early 2003. This proposal should consider the following:
  
  - An additional FTE in Institutional Research.
  
  - An annual budget allocation for the General Education Board.
  
  - One or more Associate Deans may need to be appointed to support academic major/program assessment.
  
  - A “mini-grants” program should be set up to support assessment-related projects in the academic, academic support, and administrative departments.
  
  - Institutional Research, in conjunction with the Teaching and Learning Center, and perhaps in collaboration with community college colleagues, should pursue external funding for assessment activities.
III. INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

New Paltz embarks on the process of developing a high-quality assessment effort within a much larger state and national context [1]. Early assessment efforts in higher education began as the result of several national reports critical of the quality of undergraduate education [2]. Many institutions of higher education have been late in responding to public calls to demonstrate their effectiveness, believing assessment to be a passing “fad.” However, assessment now has a twenty-year history. The recent incorporation of assessment into regional and disciplinary accreditation guidelines is evidence of its likely longevity. Irrespective of external pressures, many institutions have demonstrated the value of engaging in a systematic, on-going, reflective practice. While Truman State is a commonly cited example, in fact many other institutions have implemented quality assessment processes. Alverno, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Kalamazoo, California State, New Mexico State, and a host of others have documented the improvement in the teaching and learning environment on their campuses, achieved as a result of their assessment initiatives.

New Paltz is fortunate in that we can learn from and build upon the successes and struggles of our peers. The twenty-year history of assessment has yielded a body of scholarship and practice that is at our disposal. Organizations such as the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) have promoted the positive practice of assessment by developing important policy documents such as the widely-used “Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning” [3]. These practices are evident in the works of Trudy Banta and her colleagues, which identify eighty cases in which assessment has been instrumental in improving student learning [4]. Actual assessment plans and policy documents of institutions such as New Mexico State (http://www.nmsu.edu/Research/iresearc/) University of California at Sacramento (http://www.csus.edu/portfolio/), the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (http://www.oir.uiuc.edu/assessment/plans.html) and North Carolina State (http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/index.html) are readily available through campus websites. These resources, and many others, have informed the work of the Assessment Steering Committee and assisted us in understanding the national context in which we are working.

What does “assessment” mean and who are the audiences?
Assessment can have any number of meanings to members of a campus community, depending on their experience and orientation. Developing a common understanding of assessment was, in fact, one of the biggest challenges faced by the Steering Committee. The variation in meaning attributed to assessment posed challenges for our group, but is reflective of experiences nationwide:

“One of the most significant and imposing obstacles to the advancement of the assessment agenda at the national level is the absence of any consensus on precisely what assessment means.” [5].

The foundation for developing a common understanding of assessment is in drawing the distinction between assessment and what is more correctly referred to as “evaluation.”

“Assessment, as distinguished from evaluation, provides feedback that the assee can use to achieve better performance. On the other hand, evaluation provides a pass/fail decision relative to a fixed standard, but does not provide information that could be used for future improvements.” [6]
Thus, for academic departments, assessment involves improving the quality of teaching and learning. For administrative departments, assessment involves improving administrative practices in support of student learning and development. The guiding principle for the Assessment Steering Committee was to develop a proposal that would establish an assessment program specifically for the purpose of improving the quality of academic and administrative practices as a student-centered campus. While this was the consistent theme in our deliberations, we were also cognizant of the fact that assessment information must be provided to several external audiences. The campus as a whole must be attentive to the requirements of our regional accrediting body, Middle States Commission on Higher Education (http://www.msache.org/pubs.html). Many departments and programs must meet the stringent requirements of accrediting bodies in their disciplines. In addition, as a public institution that is part of the SUNY system, we also have an audience of taxpayers, legislators, and other public officials. The Steering Committee is confident that, if we establish an assessment program based on the recommendations contained in our proposal, we will be able to meet the requirements of these external audiences.

**What are the basic elements of the assessment process?**

Assessment is a process that can occur at a variety of organizational levels (e.g., course, program, department, institution). The elements of the process common to any level are represented in the figure below.

![Assessment Process Diagram](image)

The initial step in developing an assessment plan is to establish clearly articulated goals and objectives. This is critical to every subsequent phase of the process as it enables participants to gather relevant information, to interpret that information appropriately, and to enact meaningful improvements. Making those improvements, or closing the assessment “loop,” is what signifies an effective assessment process.

**How does assessment “fit” with our mission?**

Our campus mission encompasses research and service, as well as teaching. It is fully anticipated that departments and programs will incorporate any or all of these three aspects in their assessment planning. However, the focus of this document is on the student-centered aspect of our mission. A key excerpt from the SUNY New Paltz mission statement charges the university with providing “…a learning environment which is challenging, student-centered, and personalized. Our goal is for students to gain knowledge, skills, and confidence to contribute as productive members of their communities and professions and active citizens….” Consistent with our student-centered mission, the Strategic Plan more clearly specifies that student experiences, in and out of the classroom, should facilitate their intellectual, social, and personal
growth. The Strategic Plan further specifies some of the programs and activities that we believe are mechanisms for achieving this student-centered mission.

From the Mission Statement’s Campus-Wide Goals/Educational Outcomes:
- Develop library/information technology resources to support the curriculum.
- Provide leadership opportunities for students.
- Maintain a well-rounded residence life program.
- Promote appreciation for the value of active citizenship.
- Promote health/well-being/sense of personal responsibility.

From the Strategic Plan:
- Make courses available to facilitate students’ schedule.
- Recognize staff who provide exemplary service to students.
- Inventory practices concerning office hours, communications, etc.
- Foster and reward excellence in student advising.
- Expand space for student clubs/organizations/activities.
- Construct new residence halls/dining facility.

The goals identified in our Mission Statement and Strategic Plan are defined at a very broad level for the institution as a whole, and the selected activities and programs listed above certainly do not fully capture the breadth and depth of curricular and co-curricular activities made available to our students. Additionally, current reports on strategic plan progress provide the campus community with little systematic evidence about how those activities and programs are lending to student success and how they might be improved for greater effectiveness. As we embark on the implementation of an assessment program at New Paltz, academic and administrative departments should reflect upon how their activities contribute, directly and indirectly, to the intellectual, social, and personal growth of our students.

What types of resources are needed for assessment?
Resource requirements will vary as the campus moves through the stages of implementation, from plan development, to collection and interpretation of information, to carrying out action plans, and then to assessing the assessment process.

- **Plan Development**
  - Develop our basic knowledge of assessment practices through workshops, conferences, and other professional development opportunities that focus on what we mean by assessment, the elements of a good plan, and case studies of success and failure at other higher education institutions.
  - Time to work collaboratively to establish clear goals and objectives.
  - A physical (or virtual) location to "store" assessment information for easy retrieval.

- **Collecting and Interpreting Information**
  - Coordination to minimize duplication of efforts.
  - Knowledge of various methods and measures in assessment.
  - Materials.
  - Storage of information for sustainability over time.
  - Time to collect and analyze information and to discuss findings collaboratively.
- **Action Plans**
  - Mechanisms to share information within or across departments and to devise action plans.
  - Decision-making support from higher levels of the university when action plans call for cross-department solutions.
IV. ESTABLISHING AN ASSESSMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Communication and coordination within the complex organizational boundaries of the university is essential to ensuring that we make progress on assessment initiatives across the campus, that collaboration is encouraged, and that duplication of effort is minimized. Therefore, we are proposing that an Assessment Advisory Council with broad faculty, staff, and student representation be established by the President. This Council would also assess the overall effectiveness and quality of our assessment efforts.

A. Goals and Philosophy
The role of the Assessment Advisory Council is to establish and maintain a campus culture that will foster an enduring, high-quality assessment program focused on improvement. The Council would facilitate cross-divisional collaboration and ensure that assessment activities, as well as the decisions that flow from them, are transparent and consultative. Participation on the Council would permit a broad spectrum of the campus community to actively engage in assessment. This would be an opportunity to gain not only a broad view of the variety of assessment approaches utilized at New Paltz, but also insight into improvements that are made as a result of assessment findings.

B. Roles and Responsibilities
- Submit a budget to the President for the resources needed to support a comprehensive, campus-wide assessment process.
- Recommend professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to build assessment competencies.
- Develop and adopt a structure for reporting on our progress in carrying out a comprehensive assessment program.
- Communicate the improvements made as a result of assessment.
- Assess the assessment process as a whole.

C. Audiences
In addition to the Council’s role in coordinating assessment efforts and communicating with the campus community, the Council should consider what roles and responsibilities it might have relative to the Middle States Association and SUNY. Recommendations on Council communications with these external audiences should be made to the President.
V. ASSESSMENT IN GENERAL EDUCATION

A. Overview and Philosophy
The objective of general education assessment at New Paltz is the continuous improvement of our general education program. Assessment begins with the development of explicit goals and objectives. The upcoming implementation of the recently approved GE III program is an ideal opportunity to establish goals and define learning outcomes for general education. The learning outcomes should be designed by SUNY New Paltz faculty so that the goals of our GE III program "make sense" for New Paltz.

While our primary concern should be in creating an assessment program for General Education that "makes sense" for New Paltz, it is important that we be fully aware of the external pressures that exist for general education assessment. The 2001 Middle States accreditation report for SUNY New Paltz stipulates that "a comprehensive outcomes assessment plan needs to be developed and implemented." The next Middle States review, though still a few years off, will expect to see a general education assessment plan in place.

An immediate external consideration for general education assessment comes from the GEAR group. This system-wide group is charged with ensuring that each SUNY campus develop and implement an assessment plan for general education.

Despite GEAR's February 2002 deadline for GE assessment plan submissions, New Paltz has maintained that general education assessment could not commence prior to the approval of our GE III program. Now that the program has been approved, pressure from GEAR can be expected to increase. A general education assessment plan from New Paltz will most likely be required by the end of this year. Nevertheless, this short-term deadline should not deter us from creating the plan that is right for GE III.

GEAR’s review guidelines specify eight criteria for evaluating an assessment plan. For more comprehensive information on GEAR and their specific criteria, visit (http://www.cortland.edu/gear).

B. Principles for General Education Assessment
The GE assessment effort should be guided by the following principles:

1. The primary purpose of general education assessment is to improve student learning, teaching effectiveness, and curriculum development.
2. A general education assessment plan should not evaluate individual faculty or courses.
3. Opportunities for faculty development in the areas of pedagogy and curriculum development are essential to the assessment process.
4. A general education assessment plan should be based on goals and learning outcomes developed by the SUNY New Paltz faculty. The assessment plan must be approved by the faculty through regular governance channels.
5. Assessment of general education is most effective in improving the curriculum when it is conducted at the program level, utilizing a course-embedded strategy. Alternatives for program-level assessment include standardized testing and aggregating course-level assessments.
7. Assessment is a continuous process. As such, not all learning goals can or should be assessed at once. A multi-year cycle, consistent with internal goals and external requirements, should be established.

C. Responsibility for General Education Assessment and Time Frames
The General Education Board, created in GE III as a standing sub-committee of the Curriculum Committee, is responsible for developing an assessment plan for general education in direct collaboration with faculty that teach in general education. The Board’s responsibilities include: identifying student learning outcomes, developing measures and methods by which to assess those outcomes, administering the assessment, reviewing the results, and, ultimately, recommending changes to the GE program as warranted. The GE Board will report assessment results to the Curriculum Committee, who will share this information with academic units through the Provost and the deans.

In the short term, the GE Board will prepare a GE assessment plan for New Paltz to submit to the SUNY General Education Assessment Review Group (GEAR) by early 2003.

D. Elements of Good Practice for General Education Assessment
The Assessment Steering Committee has examined general education assessment practices at colleges and universities around the country, as well as internal and external considerations that affect GE assessment at New Paltz. As a result, we’ve identified certain elements of good practice that should be followed:

1. A complete assessment plan for GE III will:
   - Identify learning goals and objectives in each knowledge area and competency category, consistent with the Trustees’ mandate, but reflective of our own culture,
   - Identify measures and methods for assessing progress toward these goals,
   - Identify a timeframe for assessing learning outcomes, and
   - Most importantly, identify how assessment information will be used to improve the general education program.

2. Learning outcomes developed by faculty should be incorporated into the criteria for GE course approval and should be explicitly identified in course syllabi.

3. Assessment information, to the extent possible, should be garnered from existing sources (e.g., sampling of student work products) and reporting of assessment information should be done in aggregate form.

4. Responsibility for the support and coordination of assessment information should be vested with an office on campus (e.g. Institutional Research) that can ensure confidentiality and continuity and support the work of the GE Board on an on-going basis.
E. Resource Considerations
Given that General Education is not affiliated with a single department and that program-level assessment is the approach recommended here, an annual allocation for GE assessment will be necessary. The General Education board has as its mission elements other than assessment; this proposal is intended to address assessment only. The Assessment Advisory Council is charged with making an overall budget recommendation for assessment, to include General Education. The General Education Board should be prepared to provide the Council with an estimate.
VI. ASSESSMENT IN THE ACADEMIC MAJOR & PROGRAM

A. Overview and Philosophy
At the academic major or program level, assessment is intended to ensure continuous, reflective practice as a means for improving student learning and the quality of other aspects of a program (e.g. curriculum design, advising). Assessment allows faculty to, on the one hand, gather information for program improvement and on the other hand provide the information for purposes of accountability required by most external entities, such as accrediting agencies. This plan does not address classroom-based assessment, which is an option that individual faculty members may or may not choose to pursue. Instead, the form of major or program level assessment proposed here involves assessing student learning in a manner that cuts across course boundaries and is not intended to evaluate specific courses or individual members of the faculty.

The Assessment Steering Committee recognizes that our colleagues will have varying degrees of familiarity with and prior involvement in assessment. Background information on assessment will be placed on the SUNY New Paltz Assessment web page, as will representative examples of completed academic major or program assessment plans. Faculty will be encouraged to attend seminars and conferences on assessment on our campus and off-site.

The ways in which assessment data will be used will depend on the needs of the individual department or program. For example, external accrediting agencies (e.g. ABET) generally expect assessment results and actions resulting from them to be documented in renewal applications or annual reports. These results also will be included in the program review document submitted by various departments to SUNY central administration. Thus, information about assessment activities is just one component of the documentation these external audiences require. However, a single set of assessment activities should meet the requirements of multiple audiences.

B. Principles for Academic Major & Program Assessment
Assessment within the academic major or program at SUNY New Paltz should be guided by the following principles, which form the basis for our assessment plan proposal.

1. Assessment should be conducted at the program level rather than within individual courses. Classroom-based assessment is an option that individual faculty members may or may not choose to pursue, depending on their teaching philosophies. Assessment should not be used to evaluate individual courses or faculty.

2. Those who are directly responsible for the academic major/program should conduct the assessment. The faculty who develop the mission and program goals are most qualified to assess whether specific program goals and student outcomes are being achieved.

3. External sources of information, such as accreditation standards, surveys of alumnae or employers, and literature on best practices should be consulted in establishing the mission and broad goals of the program, as well as the specific program goals and learning outcomes.

4. Assessment plans may be as diverse as our campus and programs. A variety of program goals and student outcomes may be assessed by methods that may range from qualitative (e.g., portfolio evaluation) to highly quantitative (e.g., surveys). Student outcomes may reflect development in several domains including intellectual, social/personal,
clinical/technical, and professional. The balance between formative (information gathered at intervals in the process) and summative (information gathered at the end of a process) approaches to assessment and schedules for conducting assessment may vary widely from one department or program to another.

5. Faculty in many programs, especially those that have external accreditation, are already engaged in assessment to varying degrees. Assessment plans should maximize the incorporation of assessment methods already in use.

6. The responsibility for implementation of assessment at the academic major or program level lies with the faculty, and in particular, with those bodies identified within our governance bylaws as responsible (i.e., the faculty review body of each School or College, followed by the Central Curriculum Committee or Graduate Council).

7. Information about progress towards implementation of the assessment plan, and the program improvements that result from assessment, should be conveyed to the administration via departmental annual reports and compiled in a manner that simplifies the generation of reports to external stakeholders.

C. Responsibility for Academic Major and Program Assessment and Timeframes

The following section identifies those elements, based on quality practices from other institutions and the literature on assessment, that the Assessment Steering Committee believes are important to the assessment process for New Paltz. However, it is fully expected that each School will have slightly different expectations or approaches to the process and the substantive elements of assessment plans. Therefore, it is recommended that the Provost, in conjunction with the Deans, clearly specify process and responsibilities, consistent with what is recommended here. Generally, developmental planning and implementation should occur collaboratively at the department level. The resulting plans should be submitted to the Dean’s Office, reviewed and approved by the School governance body and either the Curriculum Committee or the Graduate Council.

The timetable for submitting assessment plans will be worked out by the Deans, Department Chairs, and Provost based on Program Review and Accreditation priorities. However, the expectation would be that plans from all departments or programs will have at least have been submitted for review by Fall 2003.

D. Elements of Good Practice for Academic Major and Program Assessment

We propose that all departments be responsible, via Department Chairs or Program Coordinators, for developing assessment plans.

1. Faculty will define each program or unit to be assessed in a manner that is both consistent with the assessment requirements of external stakeholders (e.g., Program Review), and reasonable in view of internal organizational structure. A separate assessment plan may be developed for an individual major program, minor program, or some other configuration of courses. More typically, an assessment plan might cover the offerings of an entire department. In some cases, multiple departments in related disciplines may be able to collaborate on assessment, particularly if those departments can identify shared goals and student outcomes, in which case the departments will submit a joint assessment plan.
2. Departmental or program faculty will develop and submit assessment plan proposals for each program or unit they define. A cover sheet and template for the proposal are appended to this document. In general, the assessment plan proposal will include:

- Mission and broad goals of the department or program
- Specific program goals and student outcomes that are linked to the mission and goals
- Activities/processes intended to contribute to program goals and student outcomes
- Methods of assessment of goals/outcomes
- Resources associated with the plan
- Personnel who will implement the plan
- Assessment schedules

3. The assessment plan proposal will be signed by the Department Chair and submitted to the Academic Dean for filing. Thus, the Deans’ offices will be repositories for the department and program level assessment plans. The Deans’ offices will distribute the proposals for peer review through local governance.

4. In accordance with governance bylaws, the faculty review body of the school or college will review and approve the assessment plan proposal. Upon approval, the proposal will be forwarded either to the Curriculum Committee (if undergraduate) or to the Graduate Council (if graduate) for review and approval.

5. The process of review and approval of assessment plans should also be consistent with the philosophy of assessment (i.e. provide feedback for improvement where necessary) and be based upon criteria of quality assessment plans. As such, review bodies must recognize the diverse needs of the different departments and programs and assess plans accordingly. The essential question for the review bodies is: Will the assessment plan yield information that will promote program improvement? As long as this criterion is met, there may be a great deal of variety in approach:

- A program’s mission and goals may reflect the unique culture of the campus or the program. Specific goals and student outcomes will usually emphasize intellectual development, but may include aspects of social, personal, professional, clinical or technical development as well.

- Some programs may employ qualitative assessments (e.g., portfolio review), while others may make more use of quantitative assessment methods (e.g., surveys).

- Although most external stakeholders are focused on the summative assessment of “outcomes,” and on the overall evaluation of programs, some departments or programs may obtain benefit from the use of more formative assessments. Thus, the balance between formative and summative assessments may depend on the needs of the individual program.

- The schedules for conducting assessment may vary. For some units, assessment may be performed on a rotating basis, with a more detailed emphasis if that department is undergoing a five-year program review. To prevent discontinuity of effort, however, plans should ensure that at least some assessment activity occurs annually on an academic year cycle.
6. Once the plan is approved, copies will be filed in Institutional Research (preferably in electronic format). Further review will be required only if a substantive change in the plan is needed, or as part of the decennial review by the Middle States Commission. Plans will be stored by Institutional Research in an electronic format that is readily available to faculty and administrators.

7. Progress on assessment will be reported annually to the appropriate Dean in the Departmental Annual Report, with copies to Institutional Research.

(See [Attachment A](#) for a proposed assessment plan template.)

**E. Resource Considerations**

The Assessment Advisory Council is charged with making an overall budget recommendation for assessment, to include Academic Major/Program assessment. Dean’s offices should be prepared to identify resources, with consideration given to the following issues:

- Faculty who are unfamiliar with assessment will need information and training.

- A “critical mass” of faculty should be given the opportunity to develop assessment plans in the context of workshops and/or training sessions led by facilitators who are skilled in assessment.

- Extensive work on assessment should be considered university service and recognized as such when documenting service activities for discretionary salary increase or other personnel actions.

- Additional staffing in Institutional Research will be needed to support the assessment program. Ideally, Institutional Research would have one staff member whose primary focus would be assessment.

Additional staff also may be needed in one or more Dean’s offices. It is recommended that one staff member (e.g., Associate Dean) be given responsibility for academic major or program level assessment within each School or College. This individual would:

- Become knowledgeable about assessment through reading and attending conferences or seminars.
- Become an expert in the kinds of specialized assessments that may be unique to the School or College (e.g., the arts, engineering).
- Ensure that departments continue to make progress in developing and implementing assessment plans.
- Serve as a liaison with Institutional Research for compiling surveys and meeting other needs of the departments within the School or College.
- Address resource needs that are identified in the assessment plans.

As plans are approved, involvement and follow-up by the Academic Deans will be crucial in ensuring a sustained effort in implementation, reporting, and program improvement.
VII. ADMINISTRATIVE & ACADEMIC SUPPORT ASSESSMENT

A. Philosophy
SUNY New Paltz is committed to providing an environment that fosters student learning and supports the professional development of staff. To achieve this, our student support services and institutional operations must strive for excellence through continuous program assessment and improvement. The Assessment Steering Committee recommends that all administrative and academic support units (those administrative departments reporting to the Vice Presidents and the academic support departments reporting to the Provost) incorporate a comprehensive outcomes assessment procedure into their day-to-day operations. These procedures should include clearly defined and measurable outcomes that reflect the university mission, as well as long-term organizational goals and objectives. Assessment planning should be inclusive, involving students, staff, and administrators, with the understanding that this effort will be systematic and ongoing.

Assessment results should be used primarily for program enhancement, strategic planning, identification of professional development needs, and to address demands for external review. Successful assessment programs require institutional commitment and leadership. Therefore, senior administrators must clearly communicate their expectations in support of such efforts. Additional resources, in the form of staff training and consultation, data analysis, and resource allocation, will be necessary to ensure an effective institution-wide assessment plan. All assessment plans should be coordinated to maximize inter-office (and inter-divisional) support and to minimize duplication of effort.

B. Principles
Assessment activities within administrative and academic support areas should be driven by the following principles:

1. A comprehensive, systemic, and ongoing assessment program is a necessary condition for continuous improvement and demonstrates a true commitment to excellence.

2. Assessment allows us to see the relationship between our mission, our actions, and our outcomes.

3. The planning of such a program should be inclusive, involving students, staff, and administrators.

4. Assessment plans should involve multiple measures, assessing both outcome and process variables, that can be linked to improvement opportunities.

5. The purpose of assessment is to offer students the best living/learning environment possible and to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of all the offices that support this environment.

6. Assessment should not be used for performance evaluation.

7. Assessment reports or information should be communicated broadly on campus.

8. An effective feedback loop ensures that assessment results are utilized in long-term planning and strategic decision making.
8. We cannot assess all things at once. Therefore, program outcomes must be prioritized with an eye toward maximum improvement.

9. The assessment process itself should be assessed regularly for refinement and enhancement.

C. Responsibility for Administrative and Academic Support Assessment and Timeframes

A short-term Administrative & Academic Support Assessment Committee (AASAC) should be established to initiate the assessment process within administrative and academic support units on campus, consistent with the philosophy and principles identified above. The role of this Committee would be to:

- Help all departments within the administrative and academic support areas see the connection between their operations and activities and the student/learning-centered mission of the university.
- Review assessment plans from each department within these support areas.
- Provide feedback to departments to guide them in their assessment program development.
- Coordinate assessment efforts of these departments, including the coordination of data gathering, to avoid duplication of effort.
- Receive assessment reports from departments and make recommendations to assist departments in making continued progress.
- Identify, and in some situations produce, staff development opportunities in support of assessment planning, data gathering, interpretation, and communication.

Given the diversity and scope of administrative and academic support departments, the AASAC would provide the centralized viewpoint needed in the initial stages to support the coordination, development, and constructive feedback that is critical to creating effective assessment plans. It is anticipated that once all departmental plans are developed and reviewed, and implementation has begun, the role of the committee would no longer be necessary. Its duties would subsequently become the responsibility of the Vice Presidents and Provost.

Membership on the AASAC should include at least two members from each of the divisions, selected by the Vice Presidents and Provost, at least one student member (preferably a student intern who receives compensation for participation), and a member of the faculty.

Assessment in the academic major programs and general education are priorities for the upcoming year and will consume a significant amount of time and effort. However, for our campus to truly be a quality institution providing a quality experience for our students, we must also make progress with respect to improving the quality of our administrative and academic support areas. Establishing the AASAC should be the first step toward this goal. Once constituted, the AASAC should clarify its scope, clarify the assessment process, and establish a reasonable timeframe for the development, review, and implementation of assessment plans. This plan should be presented to the President by May 2003, with initiation of an assessment process targeted for Fall 2003.

D. Elements of Good Practice

To facilitate the development of assessment plans within the support areas, the AASAC should create a “template” or series of guiding questions to aid departments as they put together assessment plans. A proposed template can be found in Attachment B.
E. Resource Considerations

The Assessment Advisory Council is charged with making an overall budget recommendation for assessment, to include Administrative and Academic Support assessment. The interim Administrative & Academic Support Assessment Committee (AASAC) should provide information about resource needs to the Advisory Council in the near term. A “critical mass” of professional staff should be given the opportunity to develop assessment plans in the context of workshops and/or training sessions led by facilitators who are skilled in assessment. The AASAC should also consider whether specialized training sessions designed specifically to meet the needs of administrators would be beneficial. Extensive work on assessment should be considered university service and recognized as such when documenting service activities for discretionary salary increase or other personnel actions. Additional staffing in Institutional Research will be needed to support the assessment program. Ideally, Institutional Research would have one staff member whose primary focus would be assessment.
REFERENCES


ATTACHMENT A

Academic Major/Program Assessment Plan Proposal

FACULTY:

- Business
- Education
- Fine and Performing Arts
- Liberal Arts and Sciences
- Science and Engineering

DEPARTMENT:

PROGRAM NAME (Program code(s); names of courses, program(s), or department(s)):

LEVEL:

- Undergraduate
- Graduate

TYPE OF PROPOSAL:

- New Plan
- Revision of Existing Plan

Recommended by Department Chair: ___________________________ Date ______

Reviewed and Approved by Faculty Review Committee (LA&S, FPA):

Chair of Committee: ________________________________________ Date ______

Recommended by Dean: ___________________________ Date ______

Undergraduate Programs:
Reviewed and Approved by College Curriculum Committee:

Chair, College Curriculum Committee: ___________________________ Date ______

Graduate Programs:
Reviewed and Approved by Graduate Council:

Dean of the Graduate School: ___________________________ Date ______

Reviewed and Approved by the Provost: ___________________________ Date ______
This template may be used as a guide in the development of assessment plans. Assessment will be most useful if faculty collaborate in developing the plan.

1. Define and describe the “program” that is being assessed. The assessment plan could address a group of courses, a minor program, a major program, a group of majors and/or minors, or all of the offerings of a department. Small departments that share courses and wish to collaborate in conducting assessment should submit a joint assessment plan.

2. List the mission and broad goals of the department and/or program(s) to be assessed.

3. List any sources of information external to the program (e.g., standards, professional organizations, accrediting organizations) that are relevant to the program and have been reviewed in establishing the mission and goals.

4. List the specific program objectives and student outcomes that are to be assessed. In developing this list, faculty are encouraged to consider the mission and goals of the program, and all aspects of students’ development, including:

   - intellectual development
   - social/emotional development
   - acquisition of clinical or technical skills
   - professional development

5. For each program objective or student outcome, identify where that objective or outcome is addressed in the curriculum or other activities of the department. Faculty may find it helpful to enter this information in Table 1.

6. Identify one or more assessment methods that will be used for each outcome. The information in section 5, above, may be useful in determining the most appropriate assessment strategy. The assessments may be formative in nature (i.e., to assess ongoing development of competencies) or summative (to assess outcomes). The methods may range from qualitative assessments to quantitative analysis. One method may assess more than one competency or outcome, and more than one method may be used for each. Faculty are encouraged to incorporate assessment methods that are already being used into this framework. Examples of typical assessment methods include:
Portfolio analysis
Departmental or comprehensive exams
Capstone course projects
Thesis and defense
Demonstrations of clinical or technical proficiency
Exhibitions
Performances
Presentations
National certification examinations
Rate of acceptance of alumnae into graduate school
Surveys of graduates
Surveys of students
Surveys of employers

Please list the assessment methods that will be used and their relationship to the program goals/student outcomes. The matrix below may be used for this purpose.

Table 1. Assessment Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Goal/Outcome</th>
<th>Curricular Aspects/Activities</th>
<th>Assessment Method(s) to be Used</th>
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</table>
7. For each assessment method identified above, indicate the schedule for gathering assessment information (annual, biennial, or more sporadic). List, in general terms, who will be responsible for conducting the assessment (e.g., “departmental faculty who teach the capstone course” or “graduate coordinator”). If the assessment will involve resources external to the department (e.g., surveys), please indicate this. The matrix below may be used for this purpose.

Table 2. Assessment Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Method</th>
<th>Start Date (month/year)</th>
<th>Frequency (annual, biennial, etc)</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>External Resource Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</table>
8. Please summarize how faculty intend to use the assessment information (e.g., modification of curriculum, enrollment planning, projection of resource needs).

Reporting
A section for this information will be added to the annual departmental report format. The proposed wording for this section is as follows:

Assessment and Program Improvement:
Please summarize the status of the assessment program in the department during the past year, Summarize the learning outcomes assessed, the measures used, and the findings of the assessment. Describe any program improvements that have been proposed or implemented as a result of assessment efforts. If the effects of program improvements have been assessed, please indicate the results of those assessments.

(Accredited programs also will continue to include this information in reports to accrediting agencies.) The Dean of each School/College will forward these results directly to Institutional Research, and will summarize the results of the departmental assessment programs in the annual report to the Provost. This will make the full history of assessment at the program level readily available for review by the Middle States Commission.
ATTACHMENT B

Administrative & Academic Support Assessment Plan

The following template outlines the steps most often incorporated in a departmental assessment plan.

1. Identify Program Goals
   A. Elicit feedback from staff regarding program goals for all constituencies served.
   B. Review University, Division, and Office Mission Statements, and any other Statements of Purpose.
   C. Review criteria and standards of certification for accreditation agencies or national associations that may apply.
   D. Prioritize goals and identify those that will be assessed initially.
   E. Determine how assessment data will be utilized (i.e. program improvement, strategic planning, education, marketing).

2. Formulate Detailed Objectives For Each Goal
   A. Identify activities that support each goal.
   B. Review inter-relatedness of activities.
   C. List anticipated outcomes that should occur as a result of each activity.
   D. Establish standards of performance.

3. Select Assessment Methods For Each Performance Criteria
   A. List assessment methods presently being used.
   B. Identify valid assessment instruments used in the field.
   C. Utilize appropriate external sources (i.e. Professional Associations, Accrediting Boards)
      to identify benchmarks and assessment tools.
   D. When possible, utilize multiple measures that assess outcomes and process.

4. Establish Assessment Protocol
   A. Create a timeline for conducting assessment.
   B. Identify who is responsible for what and when (i.e., who is responsible for data collection, data analysis, report writing?).
   C. Identify resources/funding necessary to conduct assessment.
   D. Consult with appropriate offices to avoid duplication of effort.

5. Collect and Analyze Data
   A. Conduct data analysis delineating strengths, challenges, and areas of improvement.

6. Provide Feedback
   A. Identify target audiences.
   B. Disseminate results and solicit feedback.
   C. Recommend changes for improvement.
   D. Modify assessment plan and outcome measures for continuous effort.