TOP RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES EXPANDING EFFORTS TO ASSESS, IMPROVE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT LEARNING

U.S. research universities use a wide range of methods to assess and improve undergraduate engagement and learning, and they are rapidly expanding these efforts, according to a survey of its U.S. members by the Association of American Universities (AAU) an association of 60 leading U.S. public and private research universities and two Canadian counterparts.

Thirty-seven, or 62 percent, of AAU’s 60 U.S. universities participated in the voluntary survey, including significant numbers of both public and private members. The vast majority of the institutions responding to the survey use quantitative data (such as time-to-degree and graduation rates) to measure student success; use student surveys to determine the quality of students’ experience; establish specific educational objectives for their undergraduates; and assess student learning, using a variety of faculty-driven, discipline-specific methods. Moreover, institutions provided examples of how such information has been used to improve student learning.

“Research universities have frequently been criticized for paying insufficient attention to undergraduate education,” said AAU President Hunter Rawlings. “If that was true in the past, it is true no longer. Our universities, and undoubtedly others like them, are strongly committed to establishing goals for both learning and progress, and are using a variety of tools to assess whether those goals are being met, to learn where they need to improve the student experience, and to determine solutions to learning problems.”

The survey document, released by AAU today, contains many examples of learning objectives for undergraduates, descriptions of methods institutions use to understand and improve undergraduate engagement, and examples of how such information has been used to improve learning. To encourage participation, AAU has protected the anonymity of the universities that responded. The survey findings are attached.

The survey results show that both public and private research universities are intensely interested in the quality of the undergraduate experience, and undergraduate learning in particular. Many kinds of information are used to assess student engagement and learning, but the most appropriate mechanisms may vary at the departmental, school and institutional levels. Institutions’ commitment to continuous improvement of the learning and engagement of undergraduate students can be seen not just in the many campus efforts documented in the responses, but also through the increasing amount of resources devoted to these issues.
One common theme in the findings is that assessment information is most useful when: a) it is closely tied to the curriculum students are learning, and b) it can be used to make improvements. Many standardized tests of undergraduate learning that facilitate comparison among institutions are deficient in these respects. Few AAU universities use standardized tests like the Collegiate Learning Assessment. In the survey, many reported that they believe these tests do not match up to appropriate learning outcomes for their institutions or programs, do not assist in improving learning, and have methodological and logistical drawbacks.

“Most of our responding institutions find that the CLA and other such tests are significantly flawed, and in any event do not connect to their own learning criteria,” Rawlings said. “Moreover, they provide little information on how or where to improve student learning.”

The AAU survey, Rawlings said, shows that research universities are seeking to improve undergraduate teaching as well as learning. He noted that AAU is in the middle of a major initiative to reform and strengthen undergraduate teaching and learning in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines at its member universities.

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The Association of American Universities is an association of 60 U.S. and two Canadian research universities organized to develop and implement effective national and institutional policies supporting research and scholarship, graduate and professional education, undergraduate education, and public service in research universities.

Visit www.aau.edu and follow us on Twitter at @AAUniversities.
AAU SURVEY ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Association of American Universities (AAU) is a nonprofit association of 60 U.S. and two Canadian preeminent public and private research universities. In early 2013, AAU surveyed its member universities to better understand:

- how AAU members define and assess undergraduate educational objectives;
- what pressures members face with respect to undergraduate student assessment; and
- AAU members’ use of particular national assessment instruments and tools, and their views about these instruments.

Thirty-seven AAU member institutions (62 percent of the membership) responded to the survey, including 23 public universities and 14 private universities within the purview of six regional accrediting agencies. The main findings of the survey are:

1) **AAU institutions are seeking to understand and improve student experience and engagement**—Nearly all respondent institutions conduct surveys using one or more instruments, including locally designed surveys as well as instruments like the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Consortium on Financing Higher Education (COFHE) surveys, and Student Experience in the Research University (SERU). These surveys provide information on student experiences and engagement, and some also ask about perceived learning gains. Most institutions find survey results helpful in improving teaching and learning, though the level of granularity of this usefulness with respect to particular learning outcomes varies across institutions.

Nearly 90% of responding institutions also use quantitative data on student success (e.g., time-to-degree, graduation rates, and employment and graduate school outcomes) to improve, or measure improvement in, teaching and learning. Institutions provided examples of how disaggregating these data allow them to identify and strengthen areas of need. Quantitative data are combined with other types of information to understand and improve student experiences.

2) **AAU institutions have established their own educational objectives for undergraduate students**—More than 80% of respondents indicated that the unit for which they were responding (most often the entire institution or the arts and sciences college) had a set of educational objectives applicable to all its undergraduate students. Within these larger units, approximately the same proportion – around 80% – indicated that at least 90% of departments or majors within the unit had also established educational objectives for their students. For those institutions indicating otherwise, it was evident from their responses that they are actively engaged in efforts to work with departments to establish clear objectives.

3) **AAU institutions use a variety of faculty-driven, discipline-specific methods to assess student learning, and choose methods depending on level of assessment**—Respondents reported on methods they used to assess student learning at both the program/department level and at the level of the entire institution or unit. Methods differ notably in frequency of use at the two levels, indicating that AAU universities are using the most appropriate methods for the level at which assessment is occurring.
4) Many national standardized tests do not meet the needs of AAU institutions and their students—Very few AAU institutions use the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), College Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), ETS Proficiency Profile, and Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile, though more publics than privates use them. Respondents indicated that these tests are misaligned with institutional or programmatic level learning outcomes. Many institutions pointed to particular problems with these tests, including:

- Ceiling effects: students score highly in their freshman year, leaving little room for improvement.
- Student motivation and sampling: students have little motivation to work hard on these tests, and those taking the test may not be representative of the undergraduate student body.
- Lack of connection between the tests and institutional curricula.
- Lack of utility: these tests provide little information on how or what to improve.

The Association of American Colleges & Universities Liberal Education and America’s Promise VALUE Rubrics are used slightly more frequently, though views are mixed and a majority of AAU schools do not use them. Positive comments about the VALUE Rubrics often pointed to their adaptability to institutional context.

5) The main stakeholders requesting information about assessment are regional accreditors, boards, and – for public universities – state governments—For public AAU universities, state governments (including Governors, legislatures, state agencies, and commissions) were most frequently mentioned as interested stakeholders, followed by regional accreditors and boards. For private AAU universities, regional accreditors and boards were most frequently mentioned. Other stakeholders, including systems, parents, students, and alumni, were mentioned less frequently.

Among the most frequently mentioned stakeholders, boards and accreditors are more likely to hold views of assessment consistent with institutions’ definitions of educational objectives and mechanisms for assessing progress toward those objectives. State governments, in contrast, often hold conflicting views about educational objectives and assessment.

6) AAU universities’ interactions with regional accreditors are generally positive, but institutions sometimes face pressure to apply assessment mechanisms misaligned with their missions—Three-quarters of responding institutions indicated that their regional accrediting agency had clearly articulated its expectations of student learning assessment. Most respondents indicated that interactions with the regionals enhanced their internal institutional assessment processes, ultimately serving to help improve the quality of teaching and learning. For example, one institution responded: “Regional accreditation provides an opportunity to showcase the depth and breadth of our institution’s assessment processes.”

However, in those cases where this did not occur, institutions cited accreditors mandating assessment in ways that detracted from locally driven means to improve learning. Institution-specific forms of assessment, such as course evaluations, surveys, qualitative data etc., were not valued by accreditors as much as compliance with more direct forms of assessment more easily deployed at smaller institutions.

7) AAU institutions provide several different means of communicating student learning objectives and outcomes to students, parents, faculty, and senior administrators. Communication to university boards, state legislators, and others often takes the form of reports and data. More
than 60% of respondents indicated that they communicate educational objectives online via public websites of individual departments, assessment offices, Centers for Teaching and Learning, course catalogs, etc. A smaller number of institutions are working to further their efforts by creating public websites to share student learning outcomes.

8) AAU institutions are moving toward centralization of assessment activities, and are devoting more resources to improving undergraduate teaching and learning through assessment than they were five years ago—About 70% of respondents, including the majority of both publics and privates, have a person or office specifically charged with developing, coordinating, or implementing student learning assessments. Publics are slightly more likely to possess such centralization of responsibilities. In institutions without centralized assessment offices, assessment occurs at the levels of school, program, and department, and is closely linked to curricula, and often includes guidance from the central administration.

The majority of respondents indicated that resources devoted to improving undergraduate teaching and learning through assessment had increased over the last five years, frequently through the creation of new offices and positions, as well as through increased demands on existing staff time spent on these activities.
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AAU member universities, like many higher education institutions, are facing growing pressure for greater transparency, accountability and assessment. Campus administrators, federal relations officers, and AAU staff are increasingly drawn into discussions with policymakers, legislators, accreditors, foundation leaders, and others on issues of undergraduate student achievement and educational quality.

In response to the growing attention to these issues, AAU conducted a survey of its member universities to better understand:

- how AAU members define and assess undergraduate educational objectives;
- what pressures members face with respect to undergraduate student assessment; and
- AAU members’ use of particular national assessment instruments and tools, and their views about these instruments.

Development of the survey was greatly aided by consultations with a task force of representatives from both public and private AAU institutions. The survey was sent to AAU Provosts and Arts & Sciences Deans in January, 2013 with a deadline for responses of late February. In total, 37 U.S. institutions, or 62% of the U.S. membership, responded to the survey. Respondents included 23 public universities (68% of AAU public members) and 14 private universities (54% of AAU private members).

Responding institutions represented six regional accrediting agencies, with five or more respondents for four of these agencies.

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1 Members of the task force were: N. John Cooper, Bettye J. and Ralph E. Bailey Dean, Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pittsburgh; Cathy Lebo, Assistant Provost for Institutional Research, The Johns Hopkins University; Jocelyn Milner, Associate Provost and Director, Academic Planning and Institutional Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison; E. Bruce Pitman, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University at Buffalo; and Lee Willard, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Senior Associate Dean for Academic Planning, Duke University. We would also like to thank Chris Eisgruber for detailed feedback and discussions on drafts of the survey.
Because many of the survey questions focus on issues that may vary across departments, schools, and colleges, universities were asked to choose the institutional unit for which they were providing responses. About 80% of respondents reported across the breadth of the undergraduate experience, with most of the remainder reporting for the Arts and Sciences school on campus.

The responding institutions represent a significant and representative sample of AAU member universities. There are eight main findings from the survey, and with each finding descriptive text, quantitative information (when appropriate), and a selection of individual responses from institutions have been included. The original language of responses has been preserved as much as possible, but some have been edited for clarity or to ensure institutional anonymity.

In sum, the survey findings show that AAU universities are intensely interested in the quality of the undergraduate experience, and undergraduate learning in particular. Many kinds of information are used to assess student engagement and learning, but the most appropriate mechanisms may vary between the departmental, school and institutional level. Institutions’ commitment to continuous improvement of the learning and engagement of undergraduate students can be seen not just in the many campus efforts documented in the responses, but also through the increasing amount of resources devoted to these issues.

One common theme in the findings is that assessment information is most useful when: a) it is closely tied to the curriculum students are learning, and b) it can be used to make improvements. Many standardized tests of undergraduate learning that facilitate comparison between institutions are deficient in these respects.

Our hope is that these findings prove useful for AAU institutions in understanding the attitudes and activities of their peers, and that they help advance discussions both on campus and with external stakeholders.
SURVEY FINDINGS

AAU institutions are seeking to understand and improve student experience and engagement.

Virtually all responding institutions (95%) survey students using one or more instruments, including locally designed instruments and broader surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Consortium on Financing Higher Education (COFHE) surveys, and Student Experience in the Research University (SERU). AAU institutional participation in some of these surveys is even higher than indicated by the survey responses; for example, 20 AAU institutions, including 19 public universities, currently participate in SERU.2

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Figure 3: Instruments used by responding institutions to survey graduating seniors

These surveys may provide information on a range of topics including student learning experiences, faculty-student interactions, student engagement, quality of instruction, student learning, major-specific experiences, and post-graduation plans. Most institutions find these survey results to be helpful in improving teaching and learning. The level of granularity of this usefulness with respect to particular learning outcomes varies across institutions, but universities often share survey response data across institutional, school and college, and departmental levels, and integrate the results with other sources of information.

Universities shared specific examples of ways they have used responses to improve teaching and learning:

All graduating seniors are asked to complete a placement survey ... designed to collect data on the post-baccalaureate plans .... The survey is also designed to identify particular learning opportunities that appear to be most relevant for students seeking full-time work or post-graduate program admission. These data are critical for helping to understand career-development and employment needs, and the strengths and weaknesses of existent co-curricular and curricular offerings. For example, analysis of past survey data reveal the significant role

2 http://cshe.berkeley.edu/research/seru/PR_SERU_NewMembers021313.pdf
part-time jobs and internships serve for graduating seniors seeking full-time employment. Students with these experiences demonstrate greater success with obtaining full-time options after graduation compared with students lacking these experiences. As a result, we dedicate significant resources to assist interested students seeking part-time jobs and internships during their tenure.

SERU is particularly helpful for providing insight into student experiences in the major and perceived learning gains in key general education outcomes. Aggregate responses are distributed annually to deans and associate deans at the university’s schools and colleges. We also frequently use them for program review and curriculum re-design projects, often in conjunction with student focus groups to better tease out the survey findings and understand students’ recommendations for needed changes to enhance their learning. Additionally, we are beginning a project to validate a portion of the SERU survey and develop more accessible and customized ways for department chairs and associate chairs to utilize the data.

We have used responses from the Graduating Student Survey to evaluate and revamp our pre-major advising practices, and in materials prepared for accreditation. Some departments also make use of student responses from the GSS in assessing outcomes for majors, primarily as a supplement to intra-departmental survey results.

We’ve used NSSE results as baseline data to establish goals and measure progress over time in study abroad and undergraduate research participation. Results have also helped us identify differences between the engagement patterns of various types of students (e.g., first generation, minority) and improve services to support the success of these students.

Program-specific results are used by departments to assess curricular changes/identify need for change; results about student engagement (e.g., research activity outside of class) are used by administrators to assess/identify need for programmatic change; and results are used to contextualize student experiences for relevant ad hoc analyses/studies.

Nearly 90% of responding institutions also use quantitative data on student success (e.g., time-to-degree, graduation rates, and employment and graduate school outcomes) to improve, or measure improvement in, teaching and learning. Quantitative data are combined with other types of information to understand and improve student experiences.
Institutions provided examples of how disaggregating these data allow them to identify and strengthen areas of need:

*We used data to establish a framework to ensure student progress is quantitatively checked every other quarter. Students are expected to achieve a completed unit threshold every other quarter. Failure to achieve results in a meeting with a counselor to work out a plan to get back on track.*

*Some time ago, faculty ... proposed and developed a group of applied master’s programs, engaging students in advanced coursework and required placement in internship positions. Some faculty voiced serious reservations about these programs, expressing concerns about the applied focus and about time-to-degree given the amount of time students would be required to spend away from campus. Quantitative information about the students – demonstrating remarkable employability and reduced time-to-degree ... – quickly silenced even the most skeptical critics.*

*The University monitors undergraduate graduation rates as a measure of student success. Graduation rates are further disaggregated by students receiving Pell Grants, students receiving other need-based aid, and students not receiving need-based aid. The data reveal that four- and six-year graduation rates for Pell Grant recipients are lower than rates for students not receiving need-based aid ... an associate dean was charged with supporting this population through one-on-one support and outreach, as well as educational programming. Collaborating with the financial aid office, the associate dean provides critical financial literacy information, with a targeted focus to those receiving full or partial funding through the University's financial aid program. Throughout the academic year, a variety of monthly workshops are offered on topics such as budgeting, working while being a student, using financial aid to study abroad, a walk-through of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and many others. Workshops in the fall are geared toward first-, second-, and third-year students while workshops in the spring are targeted at fourth-year students preparing for the workforce or graduate school.*

*Our College began a curriculum review in 2009 that has resulted in the proposal of a new curriculum that is pending approval right now .... We benchmarked credits to degree and other factors against other Big 10/CIC and large public universities nationally. We paid close attention to incoming student performance data (GPA, ACT/SAT scores), diversity, etc. We conducted student focus groups. We worked with alumni. We reviewed student debt load, as well. Very much a data driven process. We ended with a new curriculum that has specific student learning outcomes and an embedded student learning assessment model.*

*We noticed that female students were winning prestigious fellowships at lower rates than their counterparts at other elite institutions. We formed a task force to understand this pattern and analyze its causes. The task force collected more data on the participation of women in leadership positions around the university. In response to the task force recommendations, we altered our fellowship advising process and instituted new mentoring programs. We saw an immediate improvement in the performance of female fellowship applicants.*

*The Chemistry department modified its general chemistry course and offered the modified version as Chemical Thinking. Chemical Thinking teaches few topics but focuses on certain
concepts in greater depth. Students in this course and the traditional course were given the national chemistry final and both groups did not differ significantly in the grades. This indicates that the students in the Chemical Thinking course were not hurt by a reduction in course topics. Furthermore, the students in Chemical Thinking enjoyed the course more than students in the traditional course and they did significantly better in the following course (Organic Chemistry).

Analyses of time-to-degree for transfer students led to the implementation of a unique partnership with local community colleges to better prepare students for the transition to the more rigorous, conceptually-based teaching/learning environment at a large research university. Assessment results indicate that transfer students participating in this program have higher GPAs and are completing their degrees at a faster pace than non-participants.

Information on degree completers’ post-baccalaureate enrollment is distributed regularly to departments. Results have led some departments to develop curriculum with more hands-on research experience to develop a deeper learning experience and to better prepare students for the workforce immediately after graduation and for graduate studies. For example, the Psychology department developed an advanced statistics and research methods course for its majors who plan on pursuing graduate training or work in the research sector.

**AAU institutions have established their own educational objectives for undergraduate students.**

More than 80% of respondents indicated that the unit for which they were responding had developed a set of educational objectives applicable to all its undergraduate students. The remaining respondents were all reporting on behalf of their institution’s entire undergraduate student population across all schools, where fewer commonalities exist.

Within these larger units, approximately the same proportion – around 80% – indicated that at least 90% of departments or majors within the unit had also established educational objectives for their students. For those institutions indicating otherwise, it was evident from their responses that they are actively engaged in efforts to work with departments to establish clear objectives.

Institutions provided examples of specific educational objectives associated with departments or majors include. A selection of these examples is below. Many institutions also provided links to departmental or centralized websites listing educational objectives and learning goals.

### English Major Learning Outcomes (Undergraduate)

The department expects undergraduate majors in the program to be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes. These learning outcomes are used in evaluating students and the department’s undergraduate program. Students are expected to demonstrate:

1. an understanding of major theories, methods, and concepts of literary study and critical analysis.
2. an awareness of how authors and texts develop in relation to their historical contexts.
3. a comprehension of the formal qualities of key literary genres, forms, and styles.
4. an effective style of writing and a powerful use of language.

### Chemical Engineering, BS

An ability to design and conduct experiments, as well as to analyze, interpret data on
experiments relevant to chemical engineering practice.
1. Apply experimental design methods to solve chemical engineering problems.
2. Set up a laboratory experiment, collect and analyze the data, and interpret the results in the context of a real chemical engineering process.
3. Communicate data and conclusions properly in a written lab report and oral presentation.
4. Students will demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively.
5. Write and edit clear and effective engineering design reports, including technical content that is correct, supported with evidence, explained with sufficient detail, and properly documented.
6. Write and edit clear and effective reports including the creation of professional quality graphics for figures, tables, plots and charts.
7. Synthesize a large project report in the form of executive summary.
8. Prepare and make clear and effective formal presentations, including the preparation of professional quality visual aids.
9. Have an ability to participate in technical discussions.

Critical thinking (Anthropology):
Students are expected to identify significant anthropological problems by reading books and journal articles, participating in class discussions, laboratory sessions, and projects, and doing independent research. These problems are evaluated logically and systematically and placed into the relevant cultural, political, and scientific contexts. Analysis involves the examination of qualitative and/or quantitative data to make inferences and substantiate conclusions.

Department of Chemistry – List of Program Learning Objectives:
1. Students will acquire a foundation in chemistry of sufficient breadth and depth to enable them to read and critically assess the chemical literature.
2. Students will develop the basic analytical reasoning and problem solving skills required for the pursuit of scientific research.
3. Students will learn the laboratory skills required to design and safely conduct experiments and to accurately document and interpret experimental data.
4. Students will develop the ability to communicate scientific information in written and oral form.
5. Students will learn professionalism, including the ability to work in teams and conduct themselves in an ethical manner.
6. Students will understand the interdisciplinary nature of chemistry and its place in contemporary global society.

BA in Economics:
Upon completing the major, we expect that students will have developed the following:
1. Ability to analyze problems within an economic framework and apply them to real life situations.
2. Substantial knowledge of microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics.
3. Ability to use statistical models that enable them to conduct quantitative analysis of a wide variety of economic problems.
4. In addition to the above, students in the theory concentration are able to construct their own models for economic analysis.
Biology:
A student graduating with a major in biology should be well educated in the history of scientific discovery in biology, the logical and statistical procedures used to formulate and to test biological hypotheses, and technical skills needed for conducting contemporary biological research. Majors should appreciate the hierarchical nature of biological complexity, and the major structures and functions emerging at the molecular, cellular, organismal, populational and ecosystem levels. At least one dimension of contemporary research should be understood in sufficient detail that the student could describe the major hypotheses currently being tested and demonstrate familiarity with techniques used to test those hypotheses. Mastery of the material will be evident in a student's ability to critique published data, identifying ambiguities and uncertainties in conclusions drawn from those data, and in understanding the societal importance of the research. A student attaining these goals will be prepared to make creative contributions to biology through independent research and/or teaching, and will be ready for graduate training in biological research, education, health care, industrial biotechnology, and the computational, legal and business careers related to biotechnology. A major should appreciate the importance of biological knowledge for solving societal problems.

The Business Administration goals and learning outcomes are:
1. Disciplinary Competence—Students will demonstrate an understanding of the core business and strategic concepts involved in managing a business.
2. Critical Thinking & Problem Solving—Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze an unstructured problem, formulate solutions, identify strengths and weaknesses of those solutions, and make an appropriate recommendation.
3. Professional Responsibility—Students will demonstrate the ability to identify a professional dilemma and evaluate alternative courses of action.
4. Leadership & Teamwork—Students demonstrate the ability to collaborate as an effective team member in varying roles in a diverse group and in diverse environments.
5. Communication Skills—Students will express themselves logically, succinctly & using correct grammar and composition when communicating in oral or written form.
6. Multicultural Diversity—Students will develop an understanding of the importance of diversity issues in business management.

Major: Telecommunications. College: Journalism and Communications.
1. Identify, describe, and apply concepts and theories in the use and presentation of content.
2. Identify, describe, and apply professional ethical principles and the importance of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
3. Identify, describe, and apply the tools and technologies appropriate for the telecommunication professions.
4. Gather information, conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the telecommunication professions.
5. Produce appropriate output that demonstrates creativity and critical thinking either independently or collaboratively.
6. Communicate effectively in forms and styles appropriate to the telecommunication professions, audiences and the purposes they serve.

Degree Program: BA in Italian Studies - Student Learning Outcomes
At the end of the fourth year of the program, students will be able to:

1. demonstrate familiarity, both verbally and in written format, with a comprehensive overview of the principal authors, genres, and themes of Italian literature and culture, as well as connect to cultural, historical, socioeconomic, and political contexts in which these works were produced.
2. exercise advanced reading comprehension skills necessary for their engagement of these texts.
3. communicate at low to mid advanced verbal level, such as to be able to formulate, elaborate, and engage others in effective conversation on their observations and understanding of these texts.
4. command vocabulary and basic critical reading skills in a variety of cultural languages, principally: art, history, music, and regional traditions, throughout the eras of Italian cultural history.
5. think critically in formulating opinions or accepting conclusions based on studies conducted.

Middle East and North Africa Studies

Mission Statement:
The goal of an undergraduate education in Middle East and North African Studies is twofold: to develop an understanding of the history, politics, cultural expression, and societies of the Middle East and North Africa; and to develop an ability to analyze critically structures of power within and involving the region. These goals are met through interdisciplinary training that emphasizes the importance of in-depth research on the region along with an understanding of its place in a global context.

Goals:
Upon completion of the program, students will have the following:

1. Broad knowledge of early modern/modern and contemporary history and politics across the region
2. Broad knowledge of key contemporary cultural trends and phenomena in the region
3. In-depth knowledge in one historical, political, and/or cultural issue in the region
4. Broad knowledge of critical links between MENA and other world regions
5. Capability to evaluate critically sources of knowledge about the region (scholarship, journalism, media, etc.)
6. Capability to analyze critically structures of power in the region
7. Proficiency in at least one Middle Eastern language
8. Significant learning experience in a Middle Eastern or North African society
AAU institutions use a variety of faculty-driven, discipline-specific methods to assess student learning, and choose methods depending on level of assessment.

Respondents reported on methods they used to assess student learning at both the program/department level and at the level of the entire institution or unit.

Methods differ notably in frequency of use at the two levels, indicating that AAU universities are using the most appropriate methods for the level at which assessment is occurring.
Institutions provided specific examples of how they have used assessment methods to implement change in teaching and learning. These examples spanned the range from individual departments/majors to entire schools and colleges, and focused on a number of different types of improvements. Selected examples include:

The Economics Department instituted an exit exam for its graduating majors. A pilot exam was conducted in Spring 2010. The Department concluded that the exit exam was an appropriate and viable assessment of its Departmental goals. The exit exam was administered to all graduating majors in December 2011. Results from the assessment indicated that students did not do as well as desired in the area of macroeconomics. Upon review of course offerings, the Department determined that students may not have sufficient learning opportunities to master these skills and knowledge, thus the macroeconomics faculty have begun developing more upper level macroeconomics electives.

The Psychology Department faculty assessed students’ advanced research and writing skills by looking at lab reports, reviewing student work in statistics in upper-level courses, and giving an “exit” statistics quiz to seniors. Faculty observed that student performance in statistics was not meeting the standard they expected. They proposed that too much time elapsed between the required statistics course and upper-level lab courses. Without ongoing practice and an opportunity to solidify statistics skills, students lost gains made in early statistics courses by the time they reached upper-level lab courses. Faculty were asked to develop proposals to improve student performance in statistics. After an extensive review and discussion of options, it has been decided that psychology majors will now be required to take an additional statistics course in order to graduate.

Assessment of the introductory biology course series resulted in a number of changes, including an innovative collaboration across disciplines and colleges. Recognizing a language comprehension weakness in their students, biology and classics faculty worked together to create a classics course that would meet general education requirements for STEM students and would target this learning challenge. This experiment with the classics course has led to a plan to scaffold first-year study for intended biology majors with selected electives that meet general education requirements and at the same time address particular learning needs of STEM majors. Among other changes, the biology program assessment resulted in concerted efforts to verify prerequisites, to use online quizzes, and to enhance lab prep in intro biology to increase student success.

From Speech and Hearing Science: Our student assessments led us to realize that we had a gap between academics and clinical training in our instructional programs. We have thus created a flexible lab portion of our disorders classes .... Both academic and clinical instructors have some involvement in creating content of the labs, so that labs reflect the theoretical orientation of classes and the skills expected in the clinical practica. Students experience continuity across the program.

Assessment Example from Interdisciplinary Studies in Culture and Society BA for one program-level learning outcome: The student learning outcome is: “Students will explain the cohesiveness of the (seven) concentration courses, stating methodological principles of the disciplines studied and identifying an important problem, the understanding of which is enhanced by drawing on two or more disciplines represented.” Assessment takes place primarily in the senior seminar, where students are asked to discuss works that present a specific conception of
interdisciplinarity and to describe how their own course of study and seminar projects conform or diverge from established professional practices. Students are asked explicitly to address the learning outcome in class discussion, in written work (including the final seminar paper, which forms part of the senior project), and in formal oral presentations to the seminar. To assess student achievement of this outcome, the instructor discusses student work with faculty. Further, student research, as presented at an undergraduate research symposium, was considered. Students in the senior seminar reported having little perspective on the nature of interdisciplinary study before their senior year. More specifically, several students said that critical discussions of interdisciplinarity should begin earlier in the major. At the outset of the senior seminar, students had difficulty answering such questions as “How would you explain your major to someone else?” and “Why should I hire you?” These results were used to improve learning in the following way: The instructor of an earlier course required of all honors candidates and strongly recommended to all majors will expand the critical perspective on interdisciplinarity that is part of that class. Part of this more intentional focus on interdisciplinarity will be to have students read published work by faculty, with a particular eye to the implicit definitions of interdisciplinarity employed by faculty researchers. Pending approval of the Curriculum Committee, this course, with its critical perspective on the nature of interdisciplinary study, will be required of all students, in lieu of the senior research class required of non-honors majors.

Cell Biology & Neuroscience now has multi-year data on learning outcomes at program completion, scoring student performance on research and communication competencies in all of its capstone courses with a set of five customized rubrics based on its program learning goals. Significant improvements in timely progress to graduation, as well as with improved student performance measures in advanced courses have been evident. These direct assessments are augmented with indirect assessments of the revised courses and curriculum derived from an exit survey of majors linked explicitly to program goals for post-graduate success.

Example from Biobehavioral Health: A departmental assessment committee obtains indirect assessment evidence through a senior exit survey. The committee also conducts direct assessment of student learning in individual courses. Several changes were made to individual courses and to the departmental internship program. As just one example of such a change, feedback from the Senior Exit Survey indicated that students were frustrated by the progress they felt they were making in achieving learning objectives of one course because they were not able to receive in-depth feedback from the instructors, and had little time in class to focus on analyzing and interpreting their data. Using this feedback, the course was changed to allow students to spend two of their three classroom days in guided work on their research. This change allowed them more time and opportunity to learn the process of formulating hypotheses, evaluating literature and analyzing data while engaging in these activities with guidance from the instructor.

From 2004-2008, faculty in the Department of Mechanical Engineering undertook a series of experiments in pedagogy designed to strengthen learning in the six courses that form the foundation of the department’s curriculum. Efforts included experiments with small-group learning, innovations in assessment (e.g., oral exams), and the development of course-specific curricula based on Wiggins and McTighe’s model of “backward design.” Each initiative was assessed by educational researchers who examined both learning and levels of student satisfaction. Mixed methods studies were implemented that incorporated pre/post-tests of conceptual learning (these also asked students to report their level of confidence in their
answers); interviews; focus groups; and surveys. Results were reported to faculty in the department, faculty in other engineering departments, the dean of the School of Engineering, and at professional conferences. During the 2012-2013 academic year, the department is undertaking a wider reform of its core curriculum, moving to a modular structure to give students more flexibility, as well opportunities to create interdisciplinary programs. This effort is again being assessed by educational researchers to understand its impact on learning and student satisfaction.

Curriculum mapping in our School of Business revealed an overreliance on specific case studies – in essence, the same case study was being used over and over, in various classes and at various levels. Greater cross-communication among instructors led to course content revisions, affording students with greater exposure to a wider range of relevant issues.

Closing the graduation rate gap will require closing the grade gap in specific courses as well. University studies show that overall, students earn D, F, or drop grades as about 8% of total grades; for targeted minority students the rate is about 14%. Some courses have no grade gap and others have a significant grade gap. A number of course-specific projects across campus are underway to develop remedies and close these gaps. For example, starting with a pilot in 2010 and full conversion in Fall 2012, we now deliver all pre-calculus math instruction in a “flipped” classroom format: a computer lab setting where students have increased instructor time, more frequent and immediate feedback, more highly structured and focused time on task, and spontaneous and structured peer collaboration. The grade gap between all students and targeted minority students is significantly reduced or eliminated in many such courses. In 2012-13, this format served more than 3,000 students in approximately 65 course sections.

One academic department used course-embedded assessment to assess students’ critical analysis skills. Papers submitted as course assignments were randomly selected and evaluated by a faculty committee using a locally developed rubric. Faculty recognized weaknesses in the ability to ask critical questions and carry out critical analyses among rising seniors. The faculty designed junior-level seminars to foster critical thinking and enhance students’ research skills. New courses are being assessed currently.

Our STEM departments are collaborating with the Center for Faculty Excellence on course redesign projects to improve student success in large lower-level lecture courses. Assessment methods included statistical analyses to determine if specific instructional methods are correlated with higher grades on the common final exam after controlling for demographic characteristics, admissions variables, student survey responses, and class assignment performance. Findings are now being shared with other STEM instructors to promote teaching methods that increase success for all students and reduce achievement gaps by gender, race/ethnicity, and first generation status.

Three years ago, one school on campus enacted a new international experience requirement, given faculty’s desire to promote global competence among their students. The school asked the Center for Research, Learning and Teaching to assist with an evaluation of the new requirement, which has been ongoing for three years. The mechanisms used include comparisons of cohorts who did and did not have to complete the requirement, regarding the following: (1) analysis of statements, utilizing an adapted AACU global competence rubric, (2) focus groups of students who did and did not study abroad, (3) focus groups of faculty and staff, and (4) a survey of students, which utilizes a commercial instrument assessing global competence, as well as locally
developed questions. Each year, findings are presented to the school’s leadership. Examples of specific changes that have resulted thus far include the hiring of a staff person to coordinate student international experiences and further examination of student groups that should be required to complete an international experience. Additionally, because early findings suggest that the requirement is having the desired impact, it has been maintained.

We remodeled a five-credit course in Introductory Statistical Concepts that enrolls some 3,000 students annually. The redesign was a collaborative effort of colleagues from the Department of Statistics, Technology Enhanced Learning and Research, and the Office of Faculty and TA Development. First offered in spring 2003, the redesigned course incorporated a “buffet” strategy that allows students to choose from a variety of learning modes. Exercising their choice through an online contract at the beginning of each of four units of study, students may select the learning opportunities that best match their individual learning styles, abilities, and tastes. To master each course objective, they choose from a learning “buffet” that includes lectures led by faculty, individual and/or group laboratories, videos, prerequisite training modules, oral and written presentations, individual and group projects, large group problem solving, individual and group review (both live and remote), small group study sessions, and homework assignments. These choices, plus modularized course content, quick diagnosis on the part of instructors to alleviate learning deficiencies, automated course administration, and an automated help desk, optimize each student’s experience and success while decreasing costs. What’s more, in addition to improved learning, the redesign has led to a considerable decrease in the number of class withdrawals.

For health science majors, one student learning outcome is: “Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of disease and disability on the health of populations.” Two assessments are applied to measure this outcome. The Degree Candidate Exit Survey is an indirect assessment in which students self-report their level of understanding of the impact of disease and disability on the health of populations. In the Capstone Exam student knowledge of this component is directly assessed. In 2011-12, a greater percentage of students felt that they possessed an understanding of this component than the Capstone Exam results revealed. These results were used to modify the outcome for 2013-14 to reflect better the application of public health knowledge and not just knowledge acquisition.

Many national standardized tests do not meet the needs of AAU institutions and their students.

Very few AAU institutions use the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), College Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), ETS Proficiency Profile, and Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile, though more publics than privates use them.
Institutions also provided comments on these tools indicating that these tests are misaligned with institutional or programmatic level learning outcomes. Many institutions pointed to particular problems with these tests, including:

- Ceiling effects: students score highly in their freshman year, leaving little room for improvement.
- Student motivation and sampling: students have little motivation to work hard on these tests, and those taking the test may not be representative of the undergraduate student body.
- Lack of connection between the tests and institutional curricula.
- Lack of utility: these tests provide little information on how or what to improve.

A representative selection of specific comments from institutions on these tests follows:

**Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP):**

*We have had many discussions about qualification frameworks, from the original Bologna Project work, up to and including the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profiles. We have not used these directly. Two of our faculty have developed an assessment and alignment process, the Mission Alignment Assessment and Planning (MAAP) system, and have communicated with Lumina about this as an adjunct to Lumina’s own DQPs, but nothing further has developed at this time.*

*This structure seems more relevant for institutions that have higher transfer-in rates and are more frequently engaged in conversations with community college partners about expectations for learning. While the intent seems to be to provide structure for the expectations for baccalaureate and graduate degrees as well, its utility and implementation isn’t as obvious.*

*We have numerous objections to the DQP, ranging from its somewhat insulting descriptions of expectations for community college level skills to the complete impracticality of implementing evaluations of large numbers of skills and outcomes for each graduating student.*
ETS Proficiency Profile:
Our state system piloted this in 2003 and was not satisfied with the validity of results.

We feel our students would score so high we would have a ceiling effect. It does not allow for us to show growth and improvement.

The university decided to administer the ETS MAPP (now Proficiency Profile) instrument to assess new freshmen and graduating seniors. Given the size of the institution, the test was only given to a randomly selected sampling of the two groups. As an incentive, seniors received free cap and gown rental, and many did show up for the test. However, there appeared to be a lack of real effort on the part of many students, as there was little to motivate them to take the test and do their best work. The gift-card incentive for freshmen proved less enticing than the incentive used with seniors. Freshmen performed well on the ETS MAPP, so well in fact we feel that it was of limited utility in assessing learning gains over four years of college. This “ceiling effect” is not our concern alone; peer institutions also observed it. Between the lack of motivation and the ceiling effect, the university believed that the ETS MAPP did not accurately measure student achievement in writing, mathematics, and critical thinking.

Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP):
Many institutions did not comment specifically on CAAP, noting that their concerns with CLA also held for CAAP.

We feel our students would score so high we would have a ceiling effect. It does not allow for us to show growth and improvement.

The University utilized the instrument in 2004. However, it found a "ceiling effect" among University students. That is, students at selective institutions score highly on such instruments as freshmen leaving little room for improvement over the course of four years.

We used CAAP because it aligned with ACT scores (we are a predominately ACT score institution), it was the most practical tool available, and we could field it in a fairly cost-effective manner.

Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA):
The University evaluated the instrument, including the experiences of peer institutions that have used it. Given the experience of peer institutions, the University had concerns with a "ceiling effect."

We’re concerned about lack of motivation on the part of students to do a good job on the assessment. We do our own assessment activities related to our learning goals.

Our president suggested the use of CLA; it was presented to and confirmed by a faculty-led assessment panel.

The CLA has been used by several other institutions in our system, who have voiced considerable enthusiasm for it. However, we are hesitant to engage this vehicle, in part due to its high cost and the attendant small sample size. We have concluded that the CLA, while a “simple” means by which to satisfy accreditors, would represent a cynical approach to assessment in that it does not provide sufficient depth to evaluate individual programs. We are not interested in wasting
time solely to satisfy accreditors and instead are investing in a more holistic system of assessment that actually promises to impact our teaching and student learning.

We conducted two separate pilot tests of CLA. We chose not to incentivize students (which remains our policy) and anecdotal evidence indicated that the senior students did not take the exam to the best of their ability (the first-year students seem to have invested of themselves in the process). Given this challenge, and the result that CLA and institutional SAT scores are extremely highly correlated, we decided that the amount of new information we learn by a full scale implementation of CLA would not be sufficient to warrant the investment of resources needed.

We administered the CLA in Fall 2008/Spring 2009, and again in Fall 2010/Spring 2011, with an additional administration to sophomores in Fall 2012....The CLA has a number of limitations that give us pause, and at this point we have no plans to administer it again. A major area of concern is the comparison of results from different institutions in the CLA outcome data, when we have no idea how the test was administered in these various institutions. As the Council for Aid to Education notes, there is a positive correlation between ‘time on task’ and the results of the CLA. We confirmed this in our data. Thus, the methods used to recruit students to participate, and the incentives given for performance, may have very significant effects on the outcomes across institutions. For example, some institutions may assign the CLA to a course and ‘count it’ either for grade credit or extra credit in a class. Others may pay students for their time to take the CLA, or give participants special registration privileges, and so on, but have no performance incentives. Others may pay students to participate, and provide performance incentives of some kind, such as ‘highest score wins a lottery prize’. It would be very useful, given the strong claims made by those who support the CLA, if the national results were stratified by these different participation rules and incentive structures. Other issues, such as the low participation by humanities students as compared to business or science students, are worth thinking about, too. (These same issues apply to the other types of exams, such as the CAAP and the ETS PP exam.)

We piloted the CLA some years ago, but could not yield enough students for the duration of the test for the results to be meaningful.

A faculty committee considered using the CLA, but decided that the instrument did not adequately reflect the purposes, value, and variety in our undergraduate program. It was also felt that CLA results would not be a useful formative tool, providing little information on how or what to improve.

All four-year institutions in our state system have participated in the CLA annually since its adoption in fall 2004....Students selected to take the CLA complete either the performance task or the analytic writing tasks; about 100 freshman and 100 seniors complete each type of task each year.

Our university system required us to administer the CLA in 2007-08 on a pilot basis. Due to concerns about sample size and representativeness of the students we could recruit to take it, we have no plans to repeat it.

Standardized instruments do not provide the opportunity for internal improvement, and do not measure value-added for an institution as large and diverse as ours.
We note that since comparisons between freshmen and seniors are cross-sectional, it is not clear whether these gains are due to instruction (as claimed), attrition effects, maturation, or learning critical thinking from life situations apart from the college experience.

Association of American Colleges & Universities Liberal Education and America’s Promise VALUE Rubrics:
The AACU LEAP VALUE Rubrics are used more frequently than the tools above, though views are mixed and a majority of AAU schools do not use them. Positive comments about the VALUE Rubrics often pointed to their adaptability to institutional context.

We have found these rubrics to be useful and adaptable and they are well-received by the faculty.

We are still in the adaptation and implementation stage with the VALUE rubrics. While they are not perfect, they are more than “good enough,” and we prefer at this time to move ahead with a meaningful assessment effort rather than to continue to engage in “tinkering” with the details regarding “what” and “how.”

We have looked at the LEAP rubrics, and have distributed them widely as guidelines for departments and programs to use as they develop learning goals.

We plan to adapt one of the VALUE Rubrics in an assessment of a freshman program. But we will tailor the rubric to our specific purpose.

We did use one as a model/template for an internally-developed rubric, but faculty here modified the text enough to make comparisons to others not possible.

The VALUE rubric for intercultural knowledge and competence is one of the tools under consideration for assessing university internationalization initiatives. The other rubrics have recently been shared with assessment committee members as possible tools that could be used within the programs in their schools.

The VALUE rubrics allow for faculty judgment of student work as opposed to objective standardized tests. Authentic assessment of actual student work is essential to the integrity of the results, for the ultimate purpose of program improvement.

We were an early-adopter of the AAC&U LEAP initiative and welcomed the development of the LEAP VALUE rubrics. We have piloted an institutional-level direct measure assessment using the VALUE rubrics in Summer 2012 and will pilot another VALUE rubric project in Summer 2013.

Not used, although we consult them from time to time as suggestions for other assessment projects.

The VALUE rubrics were used as one of many references when our core curriculum was developed. Our core curriculum committee developed a series of rubrics that are used extensively for the core courses.
Individual units (even at the course level) adapt the VALUE rubrics. We are working with them institution-wide to develop assessments for our quality enhancement plan. We like their depth, their adaptability, and their intellectual rigor. They align well with our institution's learning outcomes as well.

We are looking at the LEAP rubrics as one tool towards assessing general education outcomes. We had a very strong pilot implementation of the CAT (critical thinking) and have not yet approached other options for additional general education learning objectives. The limited conversation we have had around LEAP VALUE on the academic side has not engendered strong support. Conversations in student affairs have been more supportive, and we have not closed the loop on the discussions.

We have found the assessment information, guidelines, practices, etc. provided by the Association of American Colleges and Universities to be extremely helpful as we began a College wide campaign to have all units define learning goals and aligned assessments. The demonstrated overlap between the learning outcomes for a liberal arts education as defined in LEAP and the qualities employers are looking for based on their quite large employer survey is extremely helpful in getting our academic units to understand the importance of assessment.

We used VALUE rubrics to assess our General Education curriculum and related academic initiatives. They were quite helpful in evaluating critical thinking skills and integrative/applied learning skills in student papers across various disciplines. We plan to promote the use of these rubrics by faculty in assessing student learning outcomes in the majors.

The Value rubrics served as models for the development of rubrics for our institutional learning goals.

We used a modification of the LEAP VALUE rubric for our institution-wide critical thinking assessment. Individual programs have also used the critical thinking rubric, however faculty do not like the wordy nature of the assessment tool.

Other national tests:
Institutions mentioned a variety of other tests that they used for assessment. These included the Critical Thinking Assessment (CAT) Test, ETS Major Field Tests, and various other discipline-specific tests. Several institutions also mentioned the use of concept inventories.

New Leadership Alliance’s “Committing to Quality: Guidelines for Assessment and Accountability in Higher Education”:
Most institutions have not considered this document; of those that have, opinions on the helpfulness of the document were mixed.

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Figure 7: Whether responding institutions had considered the New Leadership Alliance’s “Committing to Quality: Guidelines for Assessment and Accountability in Higher Education” and how helpful they found it

Comments on the New Leadership Alliance document included:

*We have concerns about the emphasis on external benchmarking of learning assessment in the “Committing to Quality” document. We think that locally driven assessments embedded in courses and programs are most likely to yield results that will guide program improvement. The emphasis on comparison and external benchmarking draws attention away from the types of assessment that are most useful to faculty and campus leaders.*

*We've become conversant in the content of the document and used it as a basis for thinking about assessment planning and discussions with other campus leaders. We've provided the document to campus leaders and others involved in teaching and learning/assessment across campus.*

*We reviewed the “Committing to Quality” document and found it to be a helpful framework for assessment efforts. This document was used more as a guide for planning and implementing assessment efforts on campus. It is a summary source of appropriate practices and can be used to initiate conversations with faculty. I encourage you to investigate the status of the New Leadership Alliance as I believe the departure of the executive director has brought the future direction of the organization into question.*

*It helps guide my thinking towards developing an institution-wide process.*

*The NLA has responsible, thoughtful, and flexible approaches to assessment that recognize the many ways assessment can and should be used.*

*The NLA document emphasizes not quality—which it rarely mentions—but assessment—which it mentions pervasively. The culture of assessment that it recommends does not guarantee quality and, indeed, is likely to stand in the way of it. Not surprisingly, dubious for-profit providers, such as the University of Phoenix and Ashford University, have adopted the New Leadership Alliance...*
document without hesitation. It provides them with a fig-leaf to cover their embarrassing dropout and default rates. We plan to continue to use the document as an example of how the assessment movement has run amok.

It appears to outline valid approaches to and reasons for assessment and the reporting of its results. It largely supports our institutional view of the value of assessment and the way(s) in which it should be carried out. Since it is supportive of our approach, and since my institution is committed to maintaining excellence commensurate with AAU membership, there is value in raising awareness of the document locally and regionally.

We are familiar with the publication and find it to be very helpful for institutions looking to design authentic assessment for program improvement.

The principles characterizing our institution's student learning assessment system reflect the guidelines outlined in this document: setting ambitious student learning goals, gathering evidence of student learning, using results to improve student learning, and reporting and sharing results .... This document is a rich resource for administrators charged with implementing and growing student learning assessment programs. This document may serve as an excellent reference to assess our approach to student learning outcomes assessment. The specific probes associated with the four major guidelines can serve as benchmarks for gauging the quality of the developing institutional assessment system, and identifying existent strengths and areas for growth. For example, when considering the question “Is your institution setting ambitious goals,” the probes suggest the following strength with our existent program: institution and program learning outcomes clearly articulate what students should be able to do, achieve, demonstrate, or know upon completion of each undergraduate degree. However, the probes also indicate room for growth in the following area: the institution and its major programs can identify places in the curriculum where students encounter or are required to achieve the stated outcomes. At this time, not all programs in the College of Arts and Sciences have readily identified how their curriculum maps to the specific learning outcomes identified for the program. The probes associated with the remaining three guidelines are similarly useful in identifying strengths and weaknesses with our existent approach to answering the question “Are our students learning?” Plans to use this document include the following: posting a link on the academic assessment website, furnishing all members of the Assessment Council (predominantly Assistant and Associate Deans) with a copy during an upcoming internal assessment workshop, and finally, dedicating time to analyze and discuss with Assessment Council members how the current assessment plan rates relative to each probe for the 4 major student learning guidelines articulated.

It does not offer anything new about why or how institutions should assess student learning outcomes; it simply repeats general recommendations from the last 20 years, such as the need to set learning outcomes goals, collect evidence, evaluate results, and use them to improve programs. We purchased the companion publication “Assuring Quality: An Institutional Self-Assessment Tool” (2012) as a potential resource for faculty committees charged with updating our General Education assessment plan and reviewing assessment practices in the majors. This document, too, is repetitive and written in a style and tone that will be unlikely to engage faculty. We'll probably use parts of it in preparing for our next accreditation, but wish that there were resources that are more directly applicable to the assessment challenges of large research institutions.
We are not convinced that it contains anything novel that the institute is not generally doing or is supposed to be doing.

The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA):
We asked public institutions about their participation in VSA because of the section of the College Portrait that reports student learning outcomes. Nine of the public universities that responded to the survey participate in the VSA. The College Portraits website lists current portraits for 13 of AAU’s 34 public members (38%).

Comments on VSA included:

We did participate for about two years, but viewership was extremely low and we chose to discontinue.

We have many doubts about the assessment tools available for this requirement, as discussed above, and we are using none of them at present. Our participation in the VSA has been very limited.

We do not participate in the VSA because we do not believe the outcomes from low stakes tests (CLA, etc.) for students are reliable. We do our own assessment of critical thinking and have a writing assessment in progress now.

After participating since the inception of the VSA, we withdrew in fall 2012 when it was time to report student learning outcomes as defined by the instrument, because we did not think the assessment tools were appropriate to our institution. The proposed reporting of student learning outcomes using standardized instruments seems to be disconnected from the ongoing efforts to improve teaching and learning on college campuses. By including scores from broad institutional assessments in the VSA, their value as a tool for institutional improvement may be compromised. Further, we ought to be very cautious not to create an environment for higher education that encourages a “teach to the test” attitude. Faculty ownership is a critical element in a successful learning outcomes program. Standardized measures that are not discipline specific or implicitly tied to programmatic goals are unlikely to have been developed in a faculty-driven process. Thus, any data collected would likely not be used by faculty for improvement and instead would serve only the purposes of providing information externally.

Other comments on national standardized tests:
Our approach has been faculty-driven, discipline specific, and locally owned. Rather than using standardized assessment tools, we have supported departments in developing program-level learning goals and approaches to assessing how well students are meeting the expectations they have set.

We have considerable concerns about the reporting of “metrics” that simply MUST be interpreted in the complex context of an individual institution’s identity and culture – including the origins and academic preparation of its student body and the nature of its individual academic programs. Numbers too easily are stripped of their context, leading to inappropriate and misleading comparisons.

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Members of the UC system, of which six belong to AAU, have their own accountability effort including comparisons with similar institutions: [http://accountability.universityofcalifornia.edu/index.php](http://accountability.universityofcalifornia.edu/index.php)
We note that both quantitative and qualitative assessments of student learning have consistently affirmed the value of the following educational practices: demanding reading and writing assignments; faculty-supervised independent research projects; high levels of student-faculty contact; high standards for student work, including rigorous grading and meaningful feedback; and a residential environment that integrates academic and extracurricular life. There is, by contrast, no non-circular evidence that a culture of assessment leads to an increase in educational quality ... We employ assessment tools, quantitative or qualitative, to the extent (and only to the extent) that those tools are well suited to sustaining and improving high levels of educational engagement.

Differences in student outcomes within an institution are far greater than those found in outcomes between institutions. For example, the scores of engineering students at different institutions tend to be more similar than the scores of engineering and humanities students at a single institution. Attempts at summarizing a complex set of learning outcomes for multiple disciplines into a single number therefore mask the real nuances in learning across the disciplines. The adoption of standardized testing to compare student learning across institutions moves higher education toward an area that is fraught with controversy. In particular, use of these standardized instruments ignores differences in institutional mission that characterize our system of higher education.

Our institution has serious concerns about assessment instruments that are not embedded in the work students regularly complete for their programs. There are very large challenges with getting seniors, in particular, motivated to take an assessment unless it is embedded in their program. We are skeptical that standardized, stand-alone assessments provide valid measures of what our students know and can do.

The number of programs and the variety of opportunities at a large, comprehensive, research university means that students have a wide array of learning experiences that cannot easily be assessed by administration of a standardized testing instrument. Even critical thinking skills, which many of these exams hope to assess, can be markedly different for students in, say, dance and engineering students. The university expects that all students will excel in their areas of concentration, and faculty members are empowered to set curricula and assess student learning in them.

We has adopted AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes as guiding principles for general education on campus. The university employs many of the high-impact practices identified by AAC&U, including first-year seminars and experiences; learning communities; writing-intensive courses; collaborative assignments and projects; undergraduate research; diversity and global learning; service learning, community-based learning; internships; and capstone courses and projects.
The main stakeholders requesting information about assessment are regional accreditors, boards, and – for public universities – state governments.

Figure 8: Percentage of responding institutions who mentioned particular stakeholders as having expressed the most interest in the results of assessment of educational objectives. (Institutions were not restricted to mentioning only one stakeholder.)

The figure above shows the number of times responses to the question about which external stakeholders have expressed the most interest in the results of assessment of educational
objectives mentioned particular categories. For public AAU universities, state governments (including Governors, legislatures, state agencies, and commissions) were most frequently mentioned as interested stakeholders, followed by regional accreditors and boards. For private AAU universities, regional accreditors and boards were most frequently mentioned. Other stakeholders, including systems, parents, students, and alumni, were mentioned less frequently.

Among the most frequently mentioned stakeholders, boards and accreditors were more likely to hold views of assessment consistent with institutions’ definitions of educational objectives and mechanisms for assessing progress toward those objectives. State governments, in contrast, often hold conflicting views about educational objectives and assessment. A sample of responses we received follow:

The federal government and accrediting agencies have expressed the most interest in assessment of educational objectives. We have complied. The view of assessment held by accrediting agencies tends to be more standardized and bureaucratic, compared to our focus on authentic and embedded assessment.

State legislators, system board members (i.e., trustees). They often are well-intentioned but do not recognize the subtleties of quality as well as quantity measures.

Our institution reports out to the state on student learning outcomes in two ways. One, enrollment data are reported, and two, a state-level program review process is in place whereby programs are reviewed on an eight-year cycle. The latter requires the program under review to report on major curricular changes to the program, changes in the field the program serves, and an accounting of how the program makes use of learning outcomes assessment to drive curricular and pedagogical improvement. Members of the Board of Trustees now routinely receive progress and assessment data, mainly with a focus on persistence and completion. State legislators sometimes work through the university’s Office of Governmental Affairs to obtain assessment data. Parents are mostly concerned with cost and placement rates and not with assessment results.

Federal legislators and our accrediting agency have expressed the most interest in the results of our assessment of educational objectives. We believe that there is consistency between the expectations of our accreditor/federal legislators, on the one hand, and our educational objectives and assessment of our progress, on the other.

The university’s current board of trustees has expressed interest in measuring student learning outcomes and using results to improve students’ overall educational experience. Their focus is somewhat more general, but consistent with our own. Several trustees serve on campus committees that are assessing our progress toward our educational objectives and reviewing results to establish strategic goals. They are working collaboratively with faculty, staff, and students to design assessment methods that can be used now and on an ongoing basis to inform curricular improvement. Examples include analyses of existing data and a survey of alumni about the value of their undergraduate experience. We regard this type of interest as supportive and productive. Our university system’s board and state-level officials have also expressed interest in how we define educational objectives and the specific methods used to assess

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5 A few institutions took issue with considering some of these as “external” stakeholders: a valid point but one which does not affect the results.
their recommended metrics and measurement methods reflect those purposes. For example, the university system’s board strongly recommended that all campuses be required to take and publicly report results from the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) so that learning outcomes could be compared across institutions in the system. Other recommendations include tying state appropriations to results of standardized tests and job placement rates. The governor has openly criticized the use of state funds for liberal arts majors and courses not directly related to employment in specific occupations. In response to each of these developments, our faculty governance body issued strong written statements concerning their objections and concerns.

Our institution’s trustees, alumni, students, and students’ parents care intensely about the quality of education. Their view of the objectives for undergraduate education is broadly consistent with that of the University’s faculty and administration. We engage with these constituencies energetically and communicate regularly about their concerns. We also compete intensely in a variety of demanding markets: we compete for undergraduate applicants, graduate students, faculty members, sponsored research dollars, and charitable contributions. These markets are sensitive to changes in educational quality. We monitor our success in these markets and evaluate trends to determine whether they require changes in behavior.

Over the last 12 months, the administration has made a concerted effort to inform the board of assessment efforts at the institutional and programmatic levels. Presentations have been made on the assessment requirements of the university's regional accreditor, program-level assessment, assessment of writing, assessment of critical thinking, assessment of undergraduate research, and assessment of public service.

Most external stakeholders are not specifically focused on learning outcomes assessment data. They are most interested in institutional data such as persistence, time to degree, graduation rates. They are beginning to focus on learning outcomes and most don't know exactly what the data mean.

Federal legislators through pressure on the private accreditation system have pushed for more standardization of assessment. Our institution has continued to advocate for discipline-specific, program-level assessment that is faculty-driven, rather than standardized.

Our regional accreditor has expressed the greatest degree of interest in our assessment of undergraduate student learning. We sought in 2005 to focus our reaccreditation review on undergraduate learning, and the development and assessment of student learning outcomes for all baccalaureate programs. Reviewers from the accrediting agency have been supportive of our efforts, and have encouraged us to develop institution-wide structures to carry out consistent and comprehensive assessment. In preparation for the 2005 report, we developed initial structures around assessment, and in 2010 revised those structures (specifically, we established a high-level Assessment Coordinating Committee tasked with ensuring meaningful assessment of learning objectives in all programs). Feedback at that time was positive, and we continue to improve our efforts.

State Board of Higher Education, State legislators, Governor. In general, these stakeholders seem interested in narrowly focusing on simple “metrics,” often with little awareness of or appreciation for institutional differences. We engage with these stakeholders and seek to inform
and educate their decision making, while also gleaning relevant matters that make sense for institutional use, both for political reasons and, more importantly, for institutional improvement.

Parents and legislators in the state think job placement is most important, and so take a narrow view of educational objectives. The Governor thinks time to degree and throughput is most important, and that online courses are the answer to everyone's prayers. We therefore find ourselves defending the nature of the university, and the value of the on-campus social and intellectual experience. We are also experimenting with online course delivery.

**AAU universities’ interactions with regional accreditors are generally positive, but institutions sometimes face pressure to apply assessment mechanisms misaligned with their missions.**

Around three-quarters of responding institutions indicated that their regional accrediting agency had clearly articulated (through meetings or manuals) its expectations of student learning assessment (see Appendix 2 for more detail of each accrediting agency’s expectations). Publics were slightly more likely to respond affirmatively.

This pattern also held, though with more variability, across regional accrediting agencies. The figure below shows data for four regional accreditors. For the remaining two regional accreditors—The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges: Commission on Institutions of Higher Education—all responses were positive but samples were too small to show. Nonetheless, seven responding institutions (four publics and three privates, representing three different accrediting agencies) indicated that expectations of student learning assessment had not been clearly articulated, leaving room for improvement.

**Figure 9: Respondents’ answers to the question: “Has your regional accreditor clearly articulated (through meetings or manuals) its expectations of student learning assessment?” by public/private status and for the entire sample**

![Figure 9: Respondents’ answers to the question: “Has your regional accreditor clearly articulated (through meetings or manuals) its expectations of student learning assessment?” by public/private status and for the entire sample](image-url)
Most respondents indicated that interactions with the regionals enhanced their internal institutional assessment processes, ultimately serving to help improve the quality of teaching and learning. For example, one institution responded: “Regional accreditation provides an opportunity to showcase the depth and breadth of our institution’s assessment processes.”

In those cases where this did not occur, institutions cited accreditors mandating assessment in ways that detracted from locally driven means to improve learning. Institution-specific forms of assessment, such as course evaluations, surveys, qualitative data etc., were not valued by accreditors as much as compliance with forms of assessment more easily deployed at smaller institutions.

In another example of a partnership between regional accreditors and the higher education community, the six regional accrediting agencies and the six presidentially led higher education associations recently agreed on a statement of “Principles for Effective Assessment of Student Achievement.”

6 The statement grew out of a meeting of the presidents of the seven regional accrediting commissions and public and private university provosts. The statement is intended to emphasize the need to assess effectively student achievement, and the importance of conducting such assessments in ways that are congruent with the institution’s mission.

Specific comments from institutional respondents on issues of interaction with regional accreditors included:

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Interactions with the accreditor heightened awareness of these issues, but not always in a positive manner. Although accreditation brings assessment of student learning to the forefront, the "enforcement" severely detracts from the true purpose: improved learning.

We have found the peer review portions of the process to be useful. For example, during our institution’s last decennial review, we received useful counsel from peer reviewers on our plans to implement a residential college system. However, we have found interactions with the accrediting agency staff to be time-consuming and bureaucratic with no educational benefit to our students.

Accreditation requirements have sometimes led departments to revise/refine Learning Outcome Assessment Plans and have encouraged better documentation of assessment practices and findings.

Mandates to assess specific competencies in specific ways threaten to draw resources and attention from the kind of assessment that would be most useful locally. Some of the assessment processes we have adopted to meet accreditor mandates are seen by faculty as bureaucratic compliance without local benefit, to the detriment of the assessment effort as a whole on campus.

We perceived that our accrediting officials expected us to follow a fairly prescriptive process for assessing student learning outcomes in order to remain in good standing. Some of the methods we use internally to assure the quality of teaching and learning (course evaluations, surveys, qualitative data, longitudinal cohort studies) do not appear to be valued by accreditors as much as compliance with “direct” forms of assessment that are more easily deployed at smaller institutions.

One particular staff member at our regional accreditor has been a wonderful support for us in the last five years, during which we have greatly enhanced our ability to articulate and measure program-specific and college-wide learning objectives. She has helped us develop methods suitable to our curricular structures and educational philosophy.

We have more clearly articulated our priorities and our systematic exchanges of information.

The principles and expectations for documentation of student learning from our regional accreditor have shaped our internal processes significantly.

The accreditation requirements provide structure for regular review in these areas. For example, we just completed our five-year Periodic Review Report that reported on these expectations in great detail.

Fifteen years ago we were embryonic in our capacity to assess student learning. That is fundamentally altered. We are nearing the second accrediting process that I have been part of and the progress is evident. We have a ways to go, but I believe we are well-positioned.

Explicit expectations specified in our regional accreditor's criteria for accreditation are a basis for conversations among faculty, staff, and assessment leadership groups on campus.

Our regional accreditor has supported campuses with workshops and meetings to share best practices. However, there is frustration at the institutions because of the inflexible way they
apply their requirements to schools, large or small, public or private, regardless of the 
institution's mission.

Our interactions with our accreditor have been very productive and useful, but it must be said 
we had begun our own university-wide assessment efforts before they raised their expectations 
on assessment.

**AAU institutions provide several different means of communicating student learning 
objectives and outcomes to students, parents, faculty, and senior administrators. 
Communication to university boards, state legislators, and others often takes the form of 
reports and data.**

More than 60% of respondents indicated that they communicate educational objectives online via 
public websites of individual departments, assessment offices, Centers for Teaching and 
Learning, course catalogs, and other mechanisms. A smaller number of institutions are working 
to further their efforts by creating public websites to share student learning outcomes. Additional 
ways that student learning objectives and outcomes are communicated include course syllabi, 
anual reports produced by campus offices and committees, and internal campus 
communications (e-mails/intranet). Workshops, seminars, faculty development opportunities, 
and university-wide conferences were also mentioned.

Institutions provide boards and others with updates through regular reports and presentations by 
senior administrators. This information may be part of larger reporting, such as an annual report 
or plan or a set of key indicators, metrics, or scorecards. A few institutions mentioned reporting 
more broadly through accountability websites.

**AAU institutions are moving toward centralization of assessment activities, and are devoting 
more resources to improving undergraduate teaching and learning through assessment than 
they were five years ago.**

About 70% of respondents, including the majority of both publics and privates, have a person or 
office specifically charged with developing, coordinating, or implementing student learning 
assessments. Publics are slightly more likely to possess such centralization of responsibilities. 
Those institutions without this arrangement often mentioned the close linkage between 
decentralized assessment responsibilities and schools, programs, and departments.
The majority of respondents indicated that resources devoted to improving undergraduate teaching and learning through assessment had increased over the last five years, frequently through the creation of new offices and positions, as well as through increased demands on existing staff time spent on these activities. Comments included:

*We have a distributed model for assessment of student learning. The Provost’s Office coordinates these efforts at the institutional level. Each school/college has a designated representative for assessment who also serves on the University Assessment Council. In addition, each school and college has an assessment plan and submits annual assessment reports.*

*Office of Institutional Effectiveness has two individuals devoted to this area. Resources including salaries, assessment efforts, and professional support of academic departments is about $250,000 per year.*

*We have a full-time assessment specialist in the Center for Teaching and Learning who provides consultation to departments on a voluntary basis. This is a new position within the last year and represents an increase in resources devoted to assessment.*

*Each degree program is responsible for assessing student learning outcomes. This involves numerous faculty members from each program. In addition, staff members from the Dean’s office as well as the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness provide outcomes assessment guidance and support.*

*Over the last five years, we have seen substantial increases in the hours, time, energy, and dollars spent on learning assessments. In the College of Arts and Science, for example, every Director of Undergraduate Studies (and every Director of Graduate Studies) has added to his/her responsibilities a mandate to develop and carry out learning outcome assessment plans on a rotating basis. The Program Coordinator who coordinates assessment and reporting for the College must work with those faculty in order to collect annual reports.*
The Provost’s Commission on Learning Outcomes is a joint responsibility of the deans for undergraduate and graduate education and the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment, with participation from faculty and staff in every college. Every program devotes faculty and staff time and effort as appropriate to meet these growing demands. In addition, programs with external accreditation requirements do extensive learning outcomes work to maintain their accreditations.

The Office of Institutional Research & Assessment currently has approximately 2.0 FTE devoted to supporting campus-wide assessment of student learning outcomes, surveys, and many other types of evaluations. One of these positions was created specifically to manage the assessment of the Quality Enhancement Plan required for accreditation a few years ago. These central resources are inadequate for meeting all the current external expectations for assessment.

While formal staffing of the assessment effort hasn’t grown significantly as yet, more people and more resources will be called for in the coming years as our full-scale institution-wide assessment effort becomes fully functional. Technology for student portfolios, faculty assessment efforts, and reporting will all continue to grow. Student survey work has grown from a small sampling via NSSE to full student body engagement via the SERU survey, requiring a significant additional investment of time both in survey administration and, especially, in data workup and reporting.

The formation of the Office of Instruction and Assessment, led by the Assistant Vice Provost for Instruction and Assessment, has been critical to the improvement on our campus. The AVP is a full professor with an appointment in Molecular and Cellular Biology and in the Science Teacher Preparation Program. She has credibility with faculty since she is a faculty member, has significant expertise in instruction, student learning and assessment, and has an approachable personality that defuses faculty concern about doing assessment.

We do not have a person or office specifically charged with developing, coordinating, or implementing campus-wide student learning assessments. Our system is decentralized. Each department is responsible for its own assessment activities. The Vice Provosts for Undergraduate and Graduate Studies offer advice and guidance to schools and departments, as appropriate. Assessment, for the purpose of undergirding decision making generally throughout the institution, has become a strong and ongoing tradition at our institution …. Consequently, a good deal of administration/faculty discussion focuses on issues related to assessment, not only as they apply learning outcomes, but to the resource allocation generally. Assessment has become an accepted concern focus in a variety of institutional committees. We have integrated assessment as part of the traditional teaching-research-service mission of the faculty. We do not have any specific budget allocations for assessment. However, each school or department is expected to undertake on-going, assessment, as a matter of course, as part of its own resource allocation.

Within the Institutional Research office, there are two staff people who support learning assessment efforts. Within the undergraduate education office, there is one full-time assessment analyst. Other units and departments have staff who devote significant energy to assessment. The amount of resources, especially in staff time, devoted to assessment has increased significantly over the past five years.
When asked what technologies are used for managing assessment data, most respondents indicated the use of internal systems. Campus Labs/Compliance Assistant and EBI Map-Works were identified by several campuses. However, a diversity of other technologies are also being used, as can be seen in the figure above.

Some institutions may not have a centralized resource for managing assessment; when asked a similar question in a recent query of AAU Data Exchange members, only six of 24 responding institutions (25%) indicated that they used a software solution for managing assessment information/reporting. However, several of those who answered “no” mentioned using an in-house system. Of those that responded yes, two mentioned Campus Labs Compliance Assistant, two mentioned WeaveOnline, one mentioned TracDat, and the last mentioned an in-house system. Reasons for not having a central software resource included institutions still deciding what resource to use, high cost, and the lack of need when assessment is not centralized. Reasons for selecting particular software including ease of use, facilitation of accreditation requirements, and lack of other options.7

Final Thoughts
Several institutions remarked on the usefulness of opportunities for communication between campuses on these issues:

*Research institutions need to work together to design feasible and useful strategies for student learning outcomes assessment. Many of the models promoted by accrediting bodies cannot be implemented across the board in large, complex organizations. We should also make a better case for the effectiveness of some of the indirect methods of assessment that accrediting bodies*

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7 Sent Friday July 26, 2013.
discourage, but that we find to provide very valuable information for program improvement.

It would be valuable to our campus to have a forum to share best practices. Certain accrediting regions are well known for effective programs in assessment. Some nascent state efforts are beginning, but often reflect dissimilar institutions.

**Appendix 1**

**AAU Survey on Undergraduate Student Objectives and Assessment**

**Contact Information and Unit**

1) a) Please provide the name(s), title(s), and e-mail address(es) of the person or people who filled out this survey. [text]

b) Please provide the e-mail address of the appropriate contact if we have questions. [text: this e-mail address will receive a confirmation when the survey is submitted]

2) For what unit of your institution (e.g., institution-wide, Arts & Science college, etc.) are the responses below representative? [short text]

**Use of Specific Assessment Tools and Instruments**

2) For each of the following student learning assessment instruments, please check the appropriate box and provide an answer if appropriate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Not used</th>
<th>Used by individual departments and majors (if applicable)</th>
<th>Used by or to represent the entire unit.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)</td>
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</table>

If you have evaluated this tool, please provide comments about the decision-making that went into the use and application (or not) of the tool. [text]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Not used</th>
<th>Used by individual departments and majors (if applicable)</th>
<th>Used by or to represent the entire unit.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b) Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP)</td>
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</table>

If you have evaluated this tool, please provide comments about the decision-making that went into the use and application (or not) of the tool. [text]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Not used</th>
<th>Used by individual departments and majors (if applicable)</th>
<th>Used by or to represent the entire unit.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c) ETS Proficiency Profile (formerly Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress)</td>
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</table>

If you have evaluated this tool, please provide comments about the decision-making that went into the use and application (or not) of the tool. [text]
3) Has your institution, or your unit, considered the New Leadership Alliance document “Committing to Quality: Guidelines for Assessment and Accountability in Higher Education”? If so, please provide your perspective on the document and any plans you have to use it. [text]

4) a) Do you conduct surveys of graduating seniors? [yes/no]

b) If yes, please specify whether you use a standard survey template (e.g., COFHE surveys, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Student Experience in the Research University (SERU)) or a survey specific to your institution. [short text]

c) Does the survey you use ask questions that provide insight into student learning experiences, engagement, or outcomes? How valuable are the responses to such questions and how have you used them to improve teaching and learning? [text]

5) a) (For public institutions): Are you participating in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) College Portrait effort? [yes/no/NA]

b) If so, what assessment tool are you using to meet the student learning outcomes requirement? [drop-down menu with the choices VSA accepts plus NA]

c) At what stage are you in your use of this chosen tool? [text]

6) (Optional) Please tell us anything else about your unit’s, or your institution’s, use or non-use of any of these instruments that you think is relevant. For example, you might provide general
comments or discuss resource requirements, philosophical reasons to support or oppose any of these instruments, or the potential benefits or harms of using particular instruments. [text]

**Educational Objectives**
7) By educational objectives, we mean specific or general academic goals—including without being limited to the acquisition and/or enhancement of knowledge, understandings, skills, or modes of analysis, and/or the successful completion of particular kinds of projects or exercises—that students must achieve during their college experience:

   a) Does your unit have a set of educational objectives applicable to all students within it? [Yes/No]

   b) Within the unit, approximately what proportion of departments or majors have their own educational objectives for their students (an estimate is fine)? [short text]

8) Which of the following approaches does your unit, and departments or majors within it, use to assess student achievement of educational objectives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Use in program-level assessment by at least one department or major</th>
<th>Use in assessment at the level of the entire unit</th>
<th>Do not use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialized or programmatic knowledge and skills measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>A rigorous grading policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance assessments other than grades (simulations, lab and other demonstrations, field experiences, portfolios, critiques, recitals, capstone projects)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National student surveys</td>
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<td>Locally developed student surveys</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student portfolios (a purposeful collection of student work showcasing achievement of learning objectives)</td>
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<td>Student interviews or focus groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alumni surveys</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alumni interviews or focus groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer surveys</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer interviews or focus groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</table>

**Examples and Anecdotes**
9) Please provide us with two or three examples of educational objectives associated with departments or majors that are appropriate for us to share with peer institutions and policymakers. [text]

10) Please provide us with one or two concise examples of how your unit, or colleges, schools, departments or majors within it, have used assessment methods to enact change in teaching and learning, including pedagogy, course design, etc. Please include the mechanism of assessment, how it was evaluated, and whether/how changes have been measured. [text]

11) a) Does your unit—or colleges, schools, departments or majors within it—use quantitative data on student success (e.g., time-to-degree, graduation rates, and employment and graduate school outcomes) to improve, or measure improvement in, teaching and learning? [yes/no]
b) Please provide one or two examples of how, if possible. [text]

**Internal and External Stakeholders**

12) Which external stakeholders (e.g., parents, board members, state legislators, federal legislators) have expressed the most interest in the results of assessment of educational objectives? To what extent is their view of assessment consistent with your institution’s definition of its educational objectives and your mechanisms for assessing progress toward those objectives? How have you responded to the interest of these stakeholders? [text]

13) a) Please describe how educational objectives, and assessments of progress toward those goals, are communicated to students, faculty members, and senior administrators at the institution. [text]

b) Please describe how educational objectives, and assessments of progress toward those goals, are communicated to university boards and state legislators or other external stakeholders, as appropriate. [text]

14) a) Which is your regional accreditation agency? [drop-down menu]

b) Has your regional accreditor clearly articulated (through meetings or manuals) its expectations of student learning assessment? [short text but this should be a yes/no question]

c) How have your interactions with regional accreditor officials affected your internal institutional processes to assure the quality of teaching and learning? [text]

**Resources**

15) a) Does your unit have a person or office specifically charged with developing, coordinating, or implementing campus-wide student learning assessments? [yes/no]

b) Please provide information on the people or units involved, as well as anything you can say about how much resources are devoted to this task now, and how resource amounts have changed over the last five years or so. [text]

16) What technologies does your unit use for managing assessment data? [checkboxes]

- WeaveOnline
- Campus Labs
- Chalk and Wire
- Educational Informatics
- Xitracs
- EBI Map-Works
- Nuventive
- RCampus
- Taskstream
- Other (please specify)

**Other Comments**

17) (Optional) If you have any other comments on the issues touched on in this survey, please provide them below. [text]
Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools-Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment
The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

An institution may create institutional effectiveness documentation that includes a component on assessing student learning (see Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning), or it may create a bridge between two separate sets of documentation, one for the assessment of student learning and one for other aspects of institutional effectiveness.

Assessment information, derived in a manner appropriate to the institution and to its desired outcomes, should be available to and used by those who develop institutional goals and carry out strategies to achieve them. Assessment results also should be used to evaluate the assessment process itself, leading to modifications that improve its relevance and effectiveness.

Fundamental Elements of Institutional Assessment
An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

- documented, organized, and sustained assessment process to evaluate and improve the total range of programs and services; achievement of institutional mission, goals, and plans; and compliance with accreditation standards that meets the following criteria:
  - a foundation in the institution’s mission and clearly articulated institutional, unit-level, and program-level goals that encompass all programs, services, and initiatives and are appropriately integrated with one another (see Standards 1: Mission and Goals and 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal);
  - systematic, sustained, and thorough use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative measures that:
    - maximize the use of existing data and information;
    - clearly and purposefully relate to the goals they are assessing;
    - are of sufficient quality that results can be used with confidence to inform decisions;
  - support and collaboration of faculty and administration in assessing student learning and responding to assessment results;
  - clear realistic guidelines and a timetable, supported by appropriate investment of institutional resources;
  - sufficient simplicity, practicality, detail, and ownership to be sustainable;
  - periodic evaluation of the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the institution’s assessment process;
• evidence that assessment results are shared and discussed with appropriate constituents and used in institutional planning, resource allocation, and renewal (see Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal) to improve and gain efficiencies in programs, services and processes, including activities specific to the institution’s mission (e.g., service, outreach, research); and

• written institutional (strategic) plan(s) that reflect(s) consideration of assessment results.

**Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning**

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution’s students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.

Because student learning is at the heart of the mission of most institutions of higher education, the assessment of student learning is an essential component of the assessment of institutional effectiveness (see Standard 7: Institutional Assessment), which additionally monitors the environment provided for teaching and learning and the achievement of other aspects of the institution’s mission, vision, and strategic goals and plans. Assessment is not an event but a process that is an integral part of the life of the institution, and an institution should be able to provide evidence that the assessment of student learning outcomes and use of results is an ongoing institutional activity. While some of the impact of an institution on its students may not be easily or immediately measured—some institutions, for example, aim for students to develop lifelong habits that may not be fully developed for many years—the overall assessment of student learning is expected whatever the nature of the institution, its mission, the types of programs it offers, or the manner in which its educational programs are delivered and student learning facilitated.

**Fundamental Elements of Assessment of Student Learning**

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities.

• clearly articulated statements of expected student learning outcomes (see Standard 11: Educational Offerings), at all levels (institution, degree/program, course) and for all programs that aim to foster student learning and development, that are:
  - appropriately integrated with one another;
  - consonant with the institution’s mission; and
  - consonant with the standards of higher education and of the relevant disciplines;

• a documented, organized, and sustained assessment process to evaluate and improve student learning that meets the following criteria:
  - systematic, sustained, and thorough use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative measures that:
    - maximize the use of existing data and information;
    - clearly and purposefully relate to the goals they are assessing;
    - are of sufficient quality that results can be used with confidence to inform decisions; and
    - include direct evidence of student learning;
  - support and collaboration of faculty and administration in assessing student learning and responding to assessment results;
  - clear, realistic guidelines and timetable, supported by appropriate investment of institutional resources;
- sufficient simplicity, practicality, detail, and ownership to be sustainable; and
- periodic evaluation of the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the institution’s student learning assessment processes;

- assessment results that provide sufficient, convincing evidence that students are achieving key institutional and program learning outcomes;
- evidence that student learning assessment information is shared and discussed with appropriate constituents and is used to improve teaching and learning; and
- documented use of student learning assessment information as part of institutional assessment.

New England Association of Schools and Colleges-Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

Each of the eleven dimensions of institutional quality has a final paragraph directing the institution's attention toward institutional effectiveness. These considerations provide a basis for institutions to undertake self-study as well as a basis for institutional evaluation by visiting teams and the Commission. Standard 4 includes an assessment of student learning.

Standard 1: Mission and Purposes

Institutional Effectiveness

1.5 The institution periodically re-evaluates the content and pertinence of its mission and purposes, assessing their usefulness in providing overall direction in planning and resource allocation. The results of this evaluation are used to enhance institutional effectiveness.

Standard 2: Planning and Evaluation

Institutional Effectiveness

2.8 The institution determines the effectiveness of its planning and evaluation activities on an ongoing basis. Results of these activities are used to further enhance the institution's implementation of its purposes and objectives.

Standard 3: Organization and Governance

Institutional Effectiveness

3.15 The effectiveness of the institution’s organizational structure and system of governance is improved through periodic and systematic review.

Standard 4: The academic program

Assessment of Student Learning
4.48 The institution implements and provides support for systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom. Assessment is based on clear statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. Assessment provides useful information that helps the institution to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded.

4.49 The institution’s approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students.

4.50 Expectations for student learning reflect both the mission and character of the institution and general expectations of the larger academic community for the level of degree awarded and the field of study. These expectations include statements that are consistent with the institution’s mission in preparing students for further study and employment, as appropriate. (See also 1.4 and 2.7)

4.51 The institution’s approach to understanding what and how students are learning and using the results for improvement has the support of the institution’s academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty. (See also 3.12)

4.52 The institution’s system of periodic review of academic programs includes a focus on understanding what and how students learn as a result of the program. (See also 2.6, 4.9 and 4.10)

4.53 The institution ensures that students have systematic, substantial, and sequential opportunities to learn important skills and understandings and actively engage in important problems of their discipline or profession and that they are provided with regular and constructive feedback designed to help them improve their achievement.

4.54 The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, and includes external perspectives. The institution devotes appropriate attention to ensuring that its methods of understanding student learning are trustworthy and provide information useful in the continuing improvement of programs and services for students.

Institutional Effectiveness

4.55 The institution’s principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings and student learning.

Standard 5: Faculty

Institutional Effectiveness

5.24 The institution periodically evaluates the sufficiency of and support for the faculty and the effectiveness of the faculty in teaching and advising, scholarship, service, and as appropriate to
institutional mission, research and creative activity. The results of these evaluations are used to enhance fulfillment of the institution’s mission.

**Standard 6: Students**

**Institutional Effectiveness**

6.21 Through a program of regular and systematic evaluation, the institution assesses its effectiveness in admitting and retaining students and the appropriateness and effectiveness of its student services to advance institutional purposes. Information obtained through this evaluation is used to revise these goals and services and improve their achievement.

**Standard 7: Library and Other Information Resources**

**Institutional Effectiveness**

7.11 The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the adequacy, utilization, and impact of its library, information resources and services, and instructional and information technology and uses the findings to improve and increase the effectiveness of these services.

**Standard 8: Physical and Technological Resources**

**Institutional Effectiveness**

8.8 The institution’s ongoing evaluation of its physical and technological resources in light of its mission, current needs and plans for the future is a basis of realistic planning and budget allocation.

**Standard 9: Financial Resources**

**Institutional Effectiveness**

9.15 The institution has in place appropriate internal and external mechanisms to evaluate its fiscal condition and financial management and to maintain its integrity. The institution uses the results of these activities for improvement.

**Standard 10: Public Disclosure**

**Institutional Effectiveness**

10.14 Through a systematic process of periodic review, the institution ensures that its print and electronic publications are complete, accurate, available, and current. The results of the review are used for improvement.
Standard 11: Integrity

Institutional Effectiveness

11.11 The pursuit of institutional integrity is strengthened through the application of findings from periodic and episodic assessments of the policies and conditions that support the achievement of these aims among members of the institutional community.


Criterion 4: Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

4 A. The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.
   1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.
   2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning.
   3. The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
   4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
   5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
   6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).

4 B. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.
   1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.
   2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
   3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
   4. The institution’s processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.
4 C. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.
   1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
   2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.
   3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
   4. The institution’s processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice.
   (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Criterion 5: Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

The institution’s resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

5 A. The institution’s resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
   1. The institution has the fiscal and human resources and physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
   2. The institution’s resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to a superordinate entity.
   3. The goals incorporated into mission statements or elaborations of mission statements are realistic in light of the institution’s organization, resources, and opportunities.
   4. The institution’s staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained.
   5. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring expense.

5 B. The institution’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.
   1. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students—in the institution’s governance.
   2. The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight for the institution’s financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
   3. The institution enables the involvement of its administration, faculty, staff, and students in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.

5 C. The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning.
   1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities.
   2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution’s sources of revenue, such as enrollment, the economy, and state support.
5. Institutional planning anticipates emerging factors, such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.

5 D. The institution works systematically to improve its performance.
   1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations.
   2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.

**Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges**

**Requirement 5: Institutional Effectiveness**

- The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: (Institutional Effectiveness)
  - educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
  - administrative support services
  - academic and student support services
  - research within its mission, if appropriate
  - community/public service within its mission, if appropriate
- The institution has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that (1) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; (2) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and (3) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. (Quality Enhancement Plan)
  *(Note: This requirement is not addressed by the institution in its Compliance Certification.)*

**Western Association of Schools and Colleges-Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities**

**Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement**

*The institution conducts sustained, evidence-based, and participatory discussions about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives. These activities inform both institutional planning and systematic evaluations of educational effectiveness. The results of institutional inquiry, research, and data collection are used to establish priorities at different levels of the institution and to revise institutional purposes, structures, and approaches to teaching, learning, and scholarly work.*

**Strategic Thinking and Planning- Criteria for Review**

- The institution periodically engages its multiple constituencies, including faculty, in institutional reflection and planning processes which assess its strategic position, articulate priorities, examine the alignment of its purposes, core functions and resources,
and define the future direction of the institution. The institution monitors the effectiveness of its plans and planning processes, and revises them as appropriate.

- Planning processes at the institution define and, to the extent possible, align academic, personnel, fiscal, physical, and technological needs with the strategic objectives and priorities of the institution.

- Planning processes are informed by appropriately defined and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data, and include consideration of evidence of educational effectiveness, including student learning.

**Commitment to Learning and Improvement - Criteria for Review**

- The institution employs a deliberate set of quality assurance processes at each level of institutional functioning, including new curriculum and program approval processes, periodic program review, ongoing evaluation, and data collection. These processes include assessing effectiveness, tracking results over time, using comparative data from external sources, and improving structures, processes, curricula, and pedagogy.

- The institution has institutional research capacity consistent with its purposes and objectives. Institutional research addresses strategic data needs, is disseminated in a timely manner, and is incorporated in institutional review and decision-making processes. Included in the institutional research function is the collection of appropriate data to support the assessment of student learning. Periodic reviews are conducted to ensure the effectiveness of the research function and the suitability and usefulness of data.

- Leadership at all levels is committed to improvement based on the results of the inquiry, evaluation and assessment that is used throughout the institution. The faculty takes responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process and uses the results for improvement. Assessments of the campus environment in support of academic and co-curricular objectives are also undertaken and used, and are incorporated into institutional planning. *(GUIDELINE: The institution has clear, well-established policies and practices for gathering and analyzing information that lead to a culture of evidence and improvement.)*

- The institution, with significant faculty involvement, engages in ongoing inquiry into the processes of teaching and learning, as well as the conditions and practices that promote the kinds and levels of learning intended by the institution. The outcomes of such inquiries are applied to the design of curricula, the design and practice of pedagogy, and to the improvement of evaluation means and methodology. *(GUIDELINE: Periodic analysis of grades and evaluation procedures are conducted to assess the rigor and effectiveness of grading policies and practices.)*

- Appropriate stakeholders, including alumni, employers, practitioners, and others defined by the institution, are regularly involved in the assessment of educational programs.

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**Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities**

**Standard 4: Effectiveness and Improvement**
The institution regularly and systematically collects data related to clearly defined indicators of achievement, analyzes those data, and formulates evidence-based evaluations of the achievement of core theme objectives. It demonstrates clearly defined procedures for evaluating the integration and significance of institutional planning, the allocation of resources, and the application of capacity in its activities for achieving the intended outcomes of its programs and services and for achieving its core theme objectives. The institution disseminates assessment results to its constituencies and uses those results to effect improvement.

4.A – Assessment

4.A.1 The institution engages in ongoing systematic collection and analysis of meaningful, assessable, and verifiable data—quantitative and/or qualitative, as appropriate to its indicators of achievement—as the basis for evaluating the accomplishment of its core theme objectives.

4.A.2 The institution engages in an effective system of evaluation of its programs and services, wherever offered and however delivered, to evaluate achievement of clearly identified program goals or intended outcomes. Faculty have a primary role in the evaluation of educational programs and services.

4.A.3 The institution documents, through an effective, regular, and comprehensive system of assessment of student achievement, that students who complete its educational courses, programs, and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, achieve identified course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Faculty with teaching responsibilities are responsible for evaluating student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes.

4.A.4 The institution evaluates holistically the alignment, correlation, and integration of programs and services with respect to accomplishment of core theme objectives.

4.A.5 The institution evaluates holistically the alignment, correlation, and integration of planning, resources, capacity, practices, and assessment with respect to achievement of the goals or intended outcomes of its programs or services, wherever offered and however delivered.

4.A.6 The institution regularly reviews its assessment processes to ensure they appraise authentic achievements and yield meaningful results that lead to improvement.

4.B – Improvement

4.B.1 Results of core theme assessments and results of assessments of programs and services are: a) based on meaningful institutionally identified indicators of achievement; b) used for improvement by informing planning, decision making, and allocation of resources and capacity; and c) made available to appropriate constituencies in a timely manner.

4.B.2
The institution uses the results of its assessment of student learning to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices that lead to enhancement of student learning achievements. Results of student learning assessments are made available to appropriate constituencies in a timely manner.