

Progress Report on Assessment:  
Submitted to the Higher Learning Commission  
of the  
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

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During their site visit in February, 2000, the Evaluation Team from the North Central Association expressed several concerns about the status of student learning assessment at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR). The central concern expressed in that report seemed to us to be that the understanding and use of the assessment of student learning varied considerably across campus. "Where some faculty or departments are making substantive improvements as a result of assessment findings, in other areas assessments are not designed to provide useful data which could impact change or data are being collected for the purpose of reporting rather than improvement" ( pp. 39-40). Other programs lacked meaningful goals, objectives, or strategies to meet them. Finally, some faculty in their interactions with the Evaluation Team appeared to be actively resistant to campus-wide assessment efforts. There was also concern expressed about the connection between the results of assessment and institutional decision-making. "There need to be obvious connections between assessment results and program, curriculum and budget decisions" (p. 40). As a result, it was recommended that a progress report be submitted by January 1, 2004.

The Evaluation Team's comments were carefully reviewed by members of the central administration, Deans, Chairs, and faculty. Several actions have been taken across campus to increase the commitment to and use of assessment of student learning outcomes. This report summarizes some of those activities, highlighting milestones indicative of significant progress.

**Campus Highlights:**

The Provost and Chancellor's offices have focused on getting all of the programs and colleges committed to and active in assessing student learning outcomes. Several actions have been taken since the spring of 2000 to accomplish that.

Assessment Central website: The purpose of Assessment Central is to showcase what we are doing to promote teaching excellence and accountability to our stakeholders, both on and off campus. This site is the result of a collaborative effort involving every college on campus over the past calendar year. Each college developed its own assessment website following certain basic parameters. Each site includes the student learning objectives, assessment measures, the most recent assessment findings, and what curricular or other decisions were influenced by that

assessment data for each degree program in that college. The annual assessment summary reports for each college are also included.

The result of that process can be found at: <http://www.ualr.edu/provost/assessment/>  
The site is organized into the following sections, with a link to each from the front page.

- **History** is a brief chronological listing of important events in the history of assessment at UALR.
- **Assessment Highlights** will direct you to news, events, and examples of assessment excellence. This year's winners of the Assessment Achievement Awards and the program from the Assessment Expo can be found at this link.
- **Program Plans** will direct you to all of the colleges' assessment websites and help you locate the latest assessment progress report for each program listed.
- **General Education** will direct you to information about the core curriculum. The core competencies that provide a framework for the assessment of general education are listed here. The visitor will also find summaries of the most recent progress reports by each of the core courses.
- **Educational and Student Services** will direct you to what that division is doing to assess student learning outcomes. This site also includes information about the First Year Experience as well as feedback gathered biennially from our alumni.
- **Institutional Research** has the latest statistics on UALR students.
- **Document Archives** is a repository for assessment forms, procedures, and university assessment reports.
- **Sites and Resources** can direct you to non-UALR resources.
- **Committees** lists all of the current university and college assessment committee and has e-mail links to their members.

Annual progress reports will be posted by each college to its own site in late spring each year. Colleges will also maintain archives of past years. The Provost office will continue to maintain the Central site.

We are very happy with the feedback that we have received about the Assessment Central site so far. For example, the social work program at the University of Chicago contacted our social work program to ask for more information about their assessment program as the result of a visit to our website. Faculty from the Department of Mathematics and Statistics are including their efforts on the site in a presentation that they will be making at a national conference next spring.

Provost Assessment Advisory Group: This group (PAAG) has been an integral part of the assessment effort from the beginning. Each college has a representative on PAAG which has the responsibility for approving individual assessment plans. Over the last several years, the responsibilities of PAAG have been expanded. Each summer PAAG has written a "state of the campus" report which has included recommendations at both the college and the campus level. PAAG membership has been put on a clear rotational basis in order to involve more individuals in the campus-level decision-making regarding assessment. Finally, representatives from Student Affairs and the Office of Institutional Research have joined PAAG in order to broaden

the group to include more than the academic units. Assessment of student learning is a campus-wide responsibility and our main advisory group needs to reflect that.

Faculty development activities: The Provost's Office began a new faculty development series entitled "Faculty Fridays" effective the fall of 2001. Every Friday afternoon during the academic year, a workshop is held for faculty and professional staff on one of a variety of topics. These have included the scholarship of teaching, teaching with technology, developing research grants, and assessment of student learning outcomes. Assessment topics have including: assessing writing, developing valid tests, assessment in graduate programs, assessing critical thinking, assessment of online learning, and assessment validity and reliability. These sessions have been lead by faculty from across campus with expertise in these areas.

Annual core course assessment poster sessions: General education has been assessed on a course by course basis using the university's core competencies as a framework. Each fall every department with a core course participates in a poster session that highlights their assessment accomplishments over the past year. Posters are reviewed by panels of their peers. These sessions have been a source of collaboration and have helped significantly to create a community of assessment leaders across campus.

Assessment Expos in 2001, 2002 and 2003: In addition to the core poster sessions, an annual campus-wide assessment event has been held each of the past three years. Posters describing the best assessment efforts from each college are presented. Guest speakers and reviewers have been invited. Workshops on topics such as the special challenge of assessment in small graduate programs have been included. This year the five best assessment projects, as determined by PAAG, were each awarded a \$1000 Assessment Achievement Award to support their efforts.

### **College Highlights:**

Several academic units have experienced program reviews by their professional accreditation agencies since spring of 2000. Every one of those reviews has included an examination of the assessment of student learning outcomes. Some examples follow.

College of Professional Studies: Three disciplinary re-accreditation reports in Audiology/Speech Pathology, Social Work, and Health Services Administration were all very positive regarding assessment efforts.

College of Science and Mathematics: One of the few departments in this college that has an outside accreditation agency is Nursing. In Fall 2002 the National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission reviewed the Department of Nursing Self-Study Report and cited the department as a national model for the use of the Systematic Plan of Evaluation (assessment data) for program improvement as well as a national model for excellence in nursing education.

CyberCollege: All of the engineering program accreditations mandate "two-loop" student outcomes continuous improvement systems as the cornerstone of the accreditation review. Since the NCA visit, ABET accredited Computer Science for a full term under the 2000 guidelines. The Construction Management Program received a full term accreditation from ACCE. In both

cases program assessment emphasized student outcomes measurement. Information Science has begun its self-study for ABET accreditation with specific attention to student outcomes.

College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences: One of the few departments in this college that has a professional accrediting agency is Art. Its application to the National Association of Schools of Art and Design [NASAD] for continuing accreditation was approved in October 2000. The written statement prepared by the two site visit evaluators includes the following: "The curriculum, the excellent gallery program, and student work indicate the art department is doing the job of meeting the established goals and objectives."

College of Education: The UALR College of Education underwent an NCATE Continuing Accreditation visit in November 2002. This visit, predicated on newly implemented performance-based standards, was rigorous and intensive. The Unit, which is home to eleven programs that are NCATE accredited, successfully met all six standards.

College of Business: The AACSB re-accreditation Team identified Assessment in the COB as one of the College's "Effective Processes." The team commented, "Assessment processes are quite comprehensive, and the Team encourages increased usage of the results to improve the overall quality of programs."

Colleges have made a variety of efforts to deepen the college-wide commitment to and understanding of the importance of the assessment of teaching and learning. Some examples follow.

College of Professional Studies: To date the college has sent 11 faculty members in teams to the AAHE Summer Conference on assessment, and participants who have gone have become much more involved in assessment on their return. The college also hosted Trudy Banta for a two-day consultation on assessment in the college last fall. In the spring, they will bring in Dr. Susan Hatfield this spring as part of the third annual College Assessment Symposium.

College of Science and Mathematics: Dean Mike Ledbetter came to UALR after the 2000 NCA review. His policy concerning assessment is reflected in the mission statement of the college: "What we assess defines what we value. The College of Science and Mathematics is committed to an ongoing and cyclic assessment process. Our goal is to have each assessment plan contain the following: program mission, program goals, measurable student learning objectives, assessment method, and feedback mechanism. Our commitment is to a cycle of assessment activity to find out: What should our students learn, how well are they learning, and what should we change so that future students will learn more and understand better."

In 2000-01 and 2001-02, the college held its own College Poster Exhibit session on program assessment. This provided the opportunity for sharing of ideas for successful assessment activities and assessment plans among faculty of the college involved in assessment activities. In 2003-04, at the campus Assessment Expo 2003, CSAM won two of the five awards for poster exhibits on program assessment.

Faculty members have attended professional meetings to learn more about assessment and improve their skills in the assessment cycle. In 2001-02 and 2003-04, four faculty in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics participated in an MAA (Mathematical Association of America) workshop on assessment, SAUM (Strengthening Assessment in Undergraduate Mathematics), funded by the National Science Foundation and covering a 12-month period. From the workshops, these faculty have developed new skills and techniques in the assessment cycle and have revised their programs accordingly.

Cyber College: In Spring, 2003, an extensive search was conducted to find similar Applied Science programs within the U.S. Only three other universities could be identified: the University of California at Davis, the University of William and Mary, and Harvard University. An invitation was then extended to Dr. Richard Freeman from the University of California at Davis and Dr. Michael Kelly from William and Mary to assess the relevance of the UALR Applied Science curriculum and its progress and to recommend improvements. Part of their review included advice on the development of appropriate student learning outcomes for this unique interdisciplinary program. This will be a major goal for the program over the next year.

College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences: In the fall of 2000 the College distributed to all departments a three-year plan for achieving Level Three Characteristics as indicated in the North Central document Levels of Assessment Implementation: Patterns of Characteristics Matrix. Summary observations from the 2003 report follow.

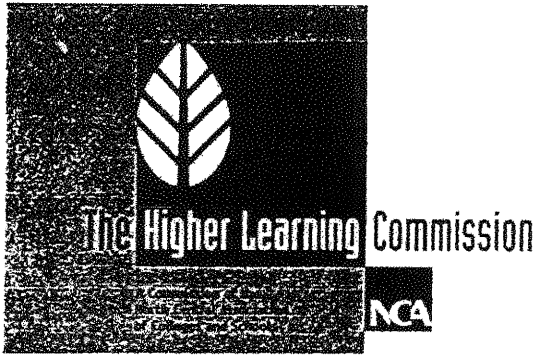
- The number of sites at which departments publish explicit references to assessment is increasing; nine of ten departments include references in the Catalog.
- Departments are making changes based upon assessment results, although documentation of the effectiveness of such changes is, in many changes, still in progress.
- The inclusion of learning objectives on course syllabi is now the standard in all departments. The primary remaining problem concerns transient part-time lecturers, who sometimes have to be hired in a short time frame.
- More faculty than ever are publishing or making presentations at professional conferences on assessment and active learning strategies.
- All departments now involve students in the assessment process (other than as subjects of assessment only).
- Rewards for participation in assessment activities are entrenched in the annual review and tenure and promotion criteria and processes of departments.
- Part-time lecturers, upon which many departments rely heavily, are being integrated into the assessment process.

College of Education: The College has implemented a database for collection of dispositional and achievement information from all programs under the umbrella of a Unified Assessment System that encompasses the NCATE programs and the other eight programs within the College. Programmatic decisions are based on data aggregated at the program level at entry, exit and transition points. Program faculty have developed rubrics to assure consistency within assessment and data-based decision-making.

**Plans for 2004 through 2010:**

David O. Belcher joined UALR as a new Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs effective July 1, 2003. This followed on the heels of our past Provost, Joel E. Anderson, becoming Chancellor effective December, 2002. One of Dr. Belcher's first tasks has been to lead a comprehensive strategic planning process for the entire campus. This process will result next spring in a plan which will guide the university for the rest of this decade. The information that has been collected over the last ten years about student learning at UALR is playing a major role in that process. Promoting the culture and scholarship of assessment has already emerged as one of the major goals. A plan will be developed out of that process to evaluate how effectively we are doing and using assessment.

Over the last several years, the focus has been on programmatic level participation and use of assessment data. A major goal for the next several years will be how to incorporate those findings into budgetary and other important campus-wide decision-making.



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## STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: January 26, 2004

STAFF: John A. Taylor, Associate Director

REVIEWED BY: Barbara Pollard Taylor, Assistant Director

INSTITUTION: University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Joel E. Anderson, Chancellor

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION RE: REPORT: A progress report due on 1/1/04 focused on assessment.

ITEMS ADDRESSED IN REPORT: The Higher Learning Commission office received the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) report on 12/22/03. The University provided a web address with supporting information on the implementation of a campus-wide plan for assessing student learning outcomes.

STAFF ANALYSIS: In addition to documenting that assessment implementation was institution-wide, the evaluation team in its report of the February 2000 visit to UALR provided evidence that assessment results are used across all academic units and that assessment is linked to curricular, budget, and planning processes. UALR reports the following assessment progress:

- Assessment Center website showcases assessment activities of each college including the annual progress reports and assessment summaries
- Provost Assessment Advisory Group approves assessment plans and reports on the "state of the campus"
- Faculty Fridays are professional development workshops on assessment topics among other topics
- Assessment Poster Sessions are held annually and highlight assessment accomplishments in core courses
- Assessment Expos highlight best assessment efforts from each College.

Subsequent to the visit of the evaluation team, UALR reports *a culture of assessment* on the campus. Assessment implementation in the general education core, in program assessment,



and in the involvement of faculty and students are evident in the documents that can be viewed on the Assessment Central website. The report demonstrates that the Provost and Chancellor's offices are involved and supportive of the campus assessment efforts. All disciplines have reviewed and revised their outcomes goals. Assessment results are fed back to faculty so that improvements can be made in curricula and pedagogy to improve student learning.

Conclusion. The UAR report and website documents demonstrate the ways that assessment is internalized and a part of the culture of the institution. The website is serving the institution in promoting its goals of teaching excellence and accountability to students. The institution is collecting, analyzing, and using assessment data to inform courses and programs to effect student learning. It is also demonstrating to students and stakeholders the achievement of broader institutional outcomes. Staff is encouraged by the University's response to the team's challenges, and further encourages the University to continue doing the "hard work" of assessment.

STAFF ACTION: Accept the report focused on assessment. No further reports are due. The institution's next comprehensive evaluation is scheduled for 2009-2010.



## The Higher Learning Commission

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### UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK

2801 S. University  
Little Rock, AR 72204

#### *Statement of Affiliation Status*

**Status:** Member (1929- .)

**Highest degree awarded:** Doctorate.

**Most recent action:** 1/26/04.

**Stipulations on affiliation status:** Accreditation at the Doctor's level is limited to the programs in Applied Science, Educational Administration, Higher Education and the J.D.

**New degree sites:** No prior Commission approval required for offering existing degree programs at new sites within the state.

**Progress reports required:** None.

**Monitoring reports required:** None.

**Contingency reports required:** None.

**Other visits required:** None.

**Last comprehensive evaluation:** 1999 - 2000

**Next comprehensive evaluation:** 2009 - 2010