UALR Assessment Academy Team Report
HLC Assessment Academy Roundtable
Oak Brook Hills Hilton, Chicago, IL
October 13-15, 2016
assessmentacademy@ualr.edu

UALR Assessment Academy Team Members:
- **Belinda Blevins-Knabe**, Professor of Psychology; College of Social Sciences and Communication; Chair of Council on Core Curriculum and Policy
- **Susie Cox**, Professor and Chair of Management; College of Business; Member of Provost's Program Assessment Group
- **Cody Decker**, Director of Office of Institutional Research; Quality Initiative on UALR Decision Support System
- **Erin Finzer**, Associate Professor of Spanish and Chair of World Languages; College of Arts, Letters and Sciences; Member of Provost's Program Assessment Group
- **Joe Giammo**, Associate Professor of Political Science and Interim Director of School of Public Affairs; College of Social Sciences and Communications; Member of Provost's Program Assessment Group
- **Nick Jovanovic**, Professor, Department of Construction Management and Civil and Construction Engineering; Assessment and Accreditation Coordinator, College of Engineering and Information Technology; Member of Council on Core Curriculum and Policy
- **Brad Patterson**, Vice Provost and Dean of Students; Member of Provost's Program Assessment Group
- **Linda Stauffer**, Associate Professor, Program Coordinator of Interpreter Education; College of Education and Health Professions; Member of Council on Core Curriculum and Policy

I. The Higher Learning Commission Assessment Academy

The Assessment Academy is one of two regularly offered programs by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to assist HLC-accredited institutions to define, develop and implement comprehensive strategies for institutional improvement. The Assessment Academy is tailored for institutions interested in developing an ongoing commitment to assessing and improving student learning. Over a span of four years, the Assessment Academy offers each institution personalized guidance in gathering the necessary information and data to survey student learning outcomes, determining goals that should be set for the institution regarding those outcomes, and developing and implementing strategies to achieve those goals.

The Assessment Academy provides institutions with new ideas and techniques for influencing institutional culture, improving the assessment of student learning and increasing institutional capacity to complete those assessments. Institutions

develop a process to regularly test and document effective practices in assessing and improving student learning.

II. UALR Assessment Academy Team: Role and Vision

The UALR Assessment Academy Team consists of eight individuals who are committed to working together with faculty, staff and administrators to create a comprehensive and ongoing program of campus assessment of student learning outcomes. Team members represent faculty from each college, both accredited and non-accredited programs, the Council on Core Curriculum and Policies, co-curricular programs, the Quality Initiative on data-supported decision making, and the Provost's Program Review Assessment Pilot Group (PPRAPG). Over the next four years, the Team will also serve, with other individuals, on the HLC Self-Study Task Force for Criteria 3 and 4.

It is the vision of the UALR Assessment Academy Team to work with faculty, staff and administrators to build a culture of continuous improvement at UALR by facilitating a comprehensive, sustainable plan that will formally assess and improve student learning on our campus. Our role is to provide tailored assistance to faculty, staff and administrators in the development and implementation of streamlined and meaningful assessment plans and to coordinate efforts to measure and value student learning across campus through clear communication and support.

Although the Assessment Academy will help UALR prepare for its upcoming HLC reaccreditation in 2019-20, the Assessment Academy Team is committed to making a culture of continuous improvement of student learning a defining aspect of UALR culture for years to come.

III. Assessment Academy Roundtable, Chicago, IL, October 13-15, 2016

For the initial meeting of the HLC Assessment Academy Fall 2016 Cohort at the October 2016 Roundtable, the UALR Team was charged by Provost Zulma Toro with the following tasks:

- A final draft of Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs), built on work done by faculty at two Summer 2016 retreats, to be presented to Faculty Senate for discussion and vote
- A streamlined Core assessment plan to lessen faculty workload
- A comprehensive continuous improvement plan for all academic programs to include student learning outcomes, assessment processes and action plan with timeline, as well as a plan for achieving faculty and staff buy-in across all academic programs

Progress on these three charges will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Although the team did not reach consensus on its recommendations regarding Institutional Learning Outcomes and general education assessment, the team agrees

that assessment is important and will require a strong coordination across all units on campus. We agree that the university should continue its efforts relating to the Quality Initiative towards creating a culture of data-informed decision making for continuous improvement in all programs, especially pertaining to student learning.

IV. Institutional Learning Outcomes

After being advised by our HLC scholar, Dr. Marie Baehr, that a distinct set of ILOs are not a requirement for compliance with HLC Criteria (providing that a university have clearly stated general education outcomes), the Team discussed the pros and cons of proposing ILOs to the Faculty Senate. On the one hand, ILOs could facilitate the organization of outcomes data as we build out Blackboard Outcomes and plan to write our reaccreditation Self-Study. A separate set of ILOs could also align and distill outcomes from general education, the Skills in the Major (SKIM), co-curricular programs, and the UALR Mission and Mission Objectives (approved in 1988). On the other hand, the formal adoption of ILOs might add another layer of complexity to our comprehensive assessment plan.

After analyzing the general education and SKIM outcomes, the proposed ILOs from two faculty assessment retreats in Summer 2016, and the UALR Mission and Mission Objectives, the Team identified three broad categories that seemed to capture overlapping ideas among the outcome sets: Methods of Inquiry, Communication and Ethical Reasoning. The Team would like to discuss adopting these three categories--at the very least for internal organization purposes--with the Faculty Senate SKIM Committee by no later than October 31, 2016.

The Team recommends that the Core Educational Goals, SKIM, and ILOs share a common list of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that all UALR students are supposed to learn by the time they graduate. This alignment will not only simplify assessment, evaluation, and continuous improvement processes, but will also encourage all stakeholders to recognize that the core curriculum, the majors, and co-curricular activities all support this same small set of Institutional Learning Outcomes.

V. Streamlined Core Assessment Plan

The Team deliberated at length about the charge to streamline the current core assessment plan. A majority of the Team shared the Provost's concerns that the current plan is too complex with rubrics that entail numerous outcomes and components. These Team members that faculty will be overburdened with the additional workload of core assessment, in addition to expectations of assessment at the program level. These members acknowledged the tremendous amount of good work that has been done on the core assessment plan by the Council on Core Curriculum and Policies over the past three years, but as UALR's HLC re-accreditation visit grows closer, it is urgent that our continuous improvement processes be manageable and sustainable. Other HLC institutions have demonstrated that efficient processes can also be meaningful provided that faculty

are invested in them, and we risk losing faculty buy-in altogether if general education assessment is too burdensome.

The Team sought the advice of its Roundtable facilitator, Dr. Marie Baehr, on the current core assessment process. Dr. Baehr communicated that she found the current plan to be very comprehensive. A core simplification concept, proposed by Nick Jovanovic, was discussed with Dr. Baehr. This concept retains the guiding attributes of the current core and focuses on four ways to streamline assessment:

1. Assessing the two core educational goals related to knowledge should be performed at the degree program level instead of the general education program level because the core courses provide only an introduction to these areas of knowledge and because the knowledge goals are not common across all core curriculum areas.

2. Omitting the oral communication and interdisciplinary core curriculum areas from the core assessment plan is recommended because UALR students are not required to take core courses in either of these areas. Assessment can still take place at the degree program level and at the course level, but is inappropriate at the general education program level because it could mislead people to think that all students are required to take courses in these areas.

3. Assessing the 6 remaining core educational goals at the general education program level is recommended, rather than assessing the 100+ core learning outcomes at the core curricular area level. For each of these 6 core educational goals, a core learning goal statement should be developed in the form, "Upon completion of the core, students will be able to <action verb> <object>." Two or three components of each education goal should be identified, and performance indicators for each component should be selected. These goal statements, components, and performance indicators should be applicable across all curricular areas of the core, unlike the 100+ learning outcomes that are specific to a core curricular area.

4. Each Core Curriculum Area Assessment Committee (CAAC) should be asked to assess at least 2 of the core educational goals, instead of all 5-7 educational goals to which their courses contribute, thus equalizing and reducing the workload for each CAAC while guaranteeing that all six of the core educational goals will be assessed by multiple CAACs (triangulation).

In addition to workload reductions, these simplifications would allow the CAAC's to assess the core educational goals that are most important to them or that are most closely related to their curriculum areas. This should result in a higher level of faculty "buy-in" and "ownership" of the core assessment process. This, in turn,

should lead to higher quality assessment data, analysis, and suggestions for improvement of student learning

Finally, these simplifications would allow the entire core to be assessed by the end of the 2017-18 academic year. Each CAAC could assess one core educational goal during Spring 2017 and report the data, analysis, and continuous improvement suggestions in Fall 2017. Then, each CAAC could assess a second core educational goal in Fall 2017 and report in Spring 2018. This would allow an entire cycle of core assessment to be complete by the time the self-study report for HLC is written in the 2018-19 academic year.

The core assessment simplification concept was presented to the Council on Core Curriculum and Policies on Monday, October 17, and was discussed. The Council decided that more discussion and consideration was needed to make an informed decision.

Some Team members shared that refinement and simplification is already underway in the Core Council and involves the feedback and suggestions from the Core Assessment Area Committees (CAAC). Each CAAC identified ways to streamline and better capture assessment data in the first year of data collection. A current example is the working of CAACs to develop common rubrics that will suffice across all the core areas. Another discussion underway by the Core Council is to stagger assessment of the core goals such that all goals will be assessed each year but on a rotating schedule by curricular area.

The Core Committee is in agreement that any assessment process of the core must be supported by the assessing faculty, sustainable, and provide useful information on student learning to inform improvements. This viewpoint suggests that now is not the time to impose change on the process developed by the Core Council, but rather let the Core Council continue their work to achieve the mutual goal shared with the Team. A wholesale change in the process as understood by the CAACs would be potentially disruptive and undermine the engagement of the faculty who might see this as another exercise that could change in the future, and therefore not important. It is, however, this kind of dialogue of differing views that makes our campus strong.

VI. Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan: Five-Year Plan

Year 1 (AY 2016-17) Major Goals (Detailed timeline in section to follow):
- To assess current student learning assessment practices in every academic program and assess needs. (by December 2016)
- To provide faculty development, with PPRAPG, in the forms of workshops, guided retreats, and mentoring. (throughout Spring 2016)
- To redesign the current Assessment Central website as a communication hub for providing faculty and staff with resources, reports and information about the HLC accreditation process. Updated information will both be stored on

the website and regularly pushed to faculty through newsletters and other promotional materials. (January 2017)
- To meet briefly with every program to explain aligning program assessment with institutional goals. (February 2017)
- To implement Blackboard Outcomes as our assessment management system, with ready programs able to upload student learning objects by the end of the Spring 2017 semester. (March 2017)
- To attend the HLC Annual Conference for continued professional development in leading comprehensive institutional assessment and to meet with Assessment Academy mentor. (April 2017)
- To ensure that every academic program have a formal assessment plan in place. (May 2016)
- To obtain buy-in from administrators, faculty and staff on campus-wide assessment from all academic programs. (May 2017)

Year 2 (AY 2017-18) Major Goals:
- To support all programs in initial cycle of collecting and assessing learning objects from one student learning outcome (SLO) and reporting continuous improvement changes to curriculum. (by May 2018)
- To continue a clear communication of assessment culture.
- To facilitate initiatives and celebrations of student learning with faculty and staff towards creating a culture of continuous improvement at UALR.
- To collaborate with ATLE in promoting and valuing the scholarship of teaching and learning with SLO data.
- To work with Office of Development on using SLO data with external stakeholders.

Year 3 (AY 2018-19) Major Goals:
- To support all programs in second cycle of collecting and assessing learning objects from one student learning outcome (SLO) and reporting continuous improvement changes to curriculum. (by May 2019)
- To continue efforts from Year 2 towards promoting and celebrating a culture of continuous improvement and using SLO data strategically.
- To continue a clear communication of assessment culture and how assessment ties to upcoming HLC site visit.
- To write Self-Study content pertaining to HLC Criteria 3 and 4.
- To prepare campus community for HLC site visit.

Year 4 (AY 2019-20) Major Goals:
- To support all programs in third cycle of collecting and assessing learning objects from one student learning outcome (SLO) and reporting continuous improvement changes to curriculum. (by May 2020)
- To continue efforts from Year 3 towards promoting and celebrating a culture of continuous improvement and using SLO data strategically.
- To continue a clear communication of assessment culture and how assessment ties into HLC site visit.

- To contribute to facilitating a successful HLC site visit, as it pertains to HLC Criteria 3 and 4.

Year 5 (AY 2020-21) Major Goals:
- To celebrate our successful re-accreditation by HLC and a sustainable culture of measuring student learning at UALR.
- To evaluate feedback from HLC on how to continuously improve our assessment processes.
- To continue efforts from previous years towards promoting and celebrating a culture of continuous improvement and using SLO data strategically.
- To continue a clear communication of assessment culture and how assessment ties into HLC site visit.

VII. Detailed Timeline of Year 1 (AY 2016-17) with Deadlines

The Assessment Academy Team will meet bi-weekly (every 1ˢᵗ and 3ʳᵈ Friday at 8:30 AM in Stabler 202 during Fall 2016) and anticipates adding elements to Timeline as plans develop.

October:
12-14. HLC Assessment Academy Roundtable, Chicago, IL.
17. Report to PPRAPG. Clarify roles of Team and PPAG working together.
17. Meet with John Rathje, Scholarly and Technology Resources (STaR) and Council on Core Curriculum and Policies about implementation of Blackboard Outcomes.
17. The representatives on the Assessment Academy Team who are also on the Core Council will report to the Core Council what was learned at the first Assessment Academy Roundtable.

21. Team to meet with BB Outcomes, STaR and Council on Core Curriculum and Policies
21. Team to approve preliminary report to submit officially to Faculty Senate and Provost and to upload to HLC Student Learning Academy's Collaborative Network.
21. Contact Office of Communications to create an Assessment Academy graphic and 4x6 information card.
24. Core Council to receive Common Rubrics from all CAACs.
25. Send Survey I (requesting more detailed information about current SLOs and assessment practices) to all academic program coordinators. The purposes of Surveys I and II are to allow us to evaluate current program assessment programs and needs, as well as to establish lines of communication among Team and program coordinators and to educate program coordinators about the role of the Team.
26. Order 100 printed cards (4x6) with description of Team

and Team members to include email address (assessmentacademy@ualr.edu) to give to department chairs, program coordinators, college assessment committees.

31. Receive completed Survey I from all academic program coordinators.

31. Develop a glossary of assessment terms that aligns UALR Core assessment with HLC's commonly used vocabulary (Belinda Blevins-Knabe).

31. Team members to meet with Chairs of each college (schedule with dean to be placed on regular chairs' meeting agenda) to discuss role of Assessment Academy and moving all academic programs forward with continuous improvement processes.

31. Team members to meet with SKIM committee to discuss aligning SKIM with UALR Mission in order to organize data at institutional level in BB Outcomes and for purposes of writing Self-Study, as well as to talk about how to integrate SKIM

November

2. Meet with Kim Davis, Mary Elizabeth Moore and Nick Steele and STaR to develop a plan for obtaining buy-in and compliance on course-level assessment with Concurrent Enrollment. Also talk with Davis about how to assess Benton, Texarkana.

4. AA and PPRAPG to send letters of congratulations notifying programs that they will be invited to participate in a PPRAPG mentoring process. This letter will also outline the mentoring process and expectations of programs.

4. Belinda Blevins-Knabe to report back to Team about Core Council's discussions on simplifying core assessment plan

4. Schedule meetings with Bowen and Clinton to learn about their assessment practices.

14-15. Blackboard Outcomes Campus Visit.

18. Plan with STaR how to achieve buy-in among all faculty to use Blackboard LMS and Outcomes.

18. Evaluate data from Survey I.

28. Send Survey II (requesting feedback on program assessment support needs and current best practices) to all academic program coordinators.

28. Team members to meet with each college's assessment committee.

December

5. Receive completed Survey II from all academic program coordinators.

8. Schedule Team members to meet with each unit during February

16. Evaluate data from Survey II. Complete plan for individual programs to participate in support interventions (retreats, workshops, mentoring, consulting) specific to their needs for Spring 2017.

January

13. Establish talking points for Speakers' Bureau to meet with all programs/units during month of February.
13. Onboard a GA to assist Team.
13. Complete a Student Learning Assessment Workbook for all faculty and staff.
21. Design/order bookmarks on Assessment Academy and website with resources for unit meetings in February
21. Schedule individual programs to participate in support interventions specific to their needs throughout Spring 2017, starting end of January.
27. Launch new Assessment Central website in time for February unit meetings.
27. Invite individual programs to participate in support interventions specific to their needs throughout Spring 2017.

February

28. Team members meet with each unit on campus.
28. Push vignettes of assessment successes and best practices on campus.
28. Develop plan with ATLE to promote scholarship of teaching and learning with SLO data.

March

25. Integrate Blackboard Outcomes with Applied Communication as pilot.
28. Push vignettes of assessment successes and best practices on campus.

April

March 31-April 4. Team members attend HLC Annual Conference for professional development on leading comprehensive institutional assessment plans and to meet with mentor.
1. Publish video and PDF tutorials on how to use BB Outcomes so that ready programs can upload learning objects at end of semester.
30. Present at Unit Heads meeting with BB Outcomes subject matter expert on collecting SLO data at institutional level.

May

19. All programs have assessment plan in place, ready to collect data

on one SLO in AY2017-18.
19. Develop detailed timeline for AY2017-18

VIII. Projected Budgeted Items

Year 1

Promotional and Printed Materials	$300
Food for on-campus program workshops and retreats	1500
Incentives to faculty and programs that participate in assessment support interventions (letters for faculty members' files documenting participation in professional development, additional funds for maintenance accounts of participating programs, cash prizes, gift certificates)	6000
Guest speaker (Bill Knight, Ball State U) for professional development	
Travel + per diem	1500
Honorarium	4000
HLC Annual Conference for Team	
Registration at $500 for 8 members	4000
Airfare at $400 for 8 members	3200
Hotel at $200/night for 4 nights for 8 members	6400
Per diem at $74/day for 8 members	592

TOTAL YEAR 1: $27,492

Year 2

Incentives to faculty and programs	$6000
Celebration of continuous improvement	2000
Food for on-campus programming	1500
Honorarium and travel for two guest speakers	
$1500 travel per speaker	3000
$2500 honorarium per speaker	5000
Promotional Materials	800
Assessment Academy Mid-Point Roundtable	
Registration for 5 Team members	6000
Registration for 4 additional members	1600
Travel for 9 Team members	9000
HLC Annual Conference for Team	
Registration at $500 for 8 members	4000
Airfare at $400 for 8 members	3200
Hotel at $200/night for 4 nights for 8 members	6400
Per diem at $74/day for 8 members	592

TOTAL YEAR 2: $49,092