Introduction

The mission of Wilmington University is rooted firmly in building exemplary and innovative academic programs within the context of a student-centered learning environment. Faculty, staff and administration at Wilmington University genuinely care about their students which is expressed in a number of ways including individual attention to students, small class size, mentoring of new students and flexible course delivery models. Further, “excellence in teaching” and “relevance of the curriculum” are viewed as foundational criteria for excellent student service. It is in this spirit that we routinely assess our academic programs to determine the extent to which learning has occurred and student educational needs have been met.

Context for the Assessment of Learning Outcomes

The Academic Affairs Outcomes Assessment Plan (AAP) is a component of the Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Plan. It is within the context of the institution’s plan that Academic Affairs has established its planning and data reporting cycles. Our approach to outcomes assessment is consistent with the Mission of Wilmington University that emphasizes a focus on the teaching/learning experience in all programs. The AAP takes a three pronged approach to assessment and is graphically depicted as follows.
The foundation of this assessment plan is the concept that “good assessment must begin in the classroom and end there” (Walvord & Anderson, 1998, p. 149). Additionally, according to Suskie, (2004), the major purposes of assessment are twofold – to improve teaching and to demonstrate the effectiveness of our current efforts. Therefore, assessment of student learning must be owned by the faculty – developed by the faculty for the faculty. As a result, the Wilmington University AAP is intended to be a vehicle for faculty to make what they already do more public (Walvord & Anderson, 1998). As written by Middle States (2003, p.81), “Assessment, first and foremost, is a tool for faculty members to use as they do their very best to teach their students well”.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Academic Affairs has developed broad graduation competencies at the undergraduate and graduate level. Each academic college collects data related to the assessment of student learning at the course level and demonstrates the linkage to the specific program competencies and the graduation competencies. Each academic college has a college-specific assessment plan rooted in the Academic Affairs Assessment Plan (graphically displayed on the previous page). Programs with external accreditation requirements may vary their assessment plan as appropriate. Academic Affairs views student learning assessment as both formative and summative processes utilizing direct and indirect methods of assessment.

Formative Assessment: According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003), “formative assessment is ongoing assessment that is intended to improve an individual student’s performance” and “is used internally, primarily by those responsible for teaching a course or developing a program” (p. 27). Course-embedded outcomes assessment
conducted in some or all courses is done to improve the course content, provide feedback to faculty and program administrators, assist faculty to integrate the concept of outcomes assessment as a routine part of their instruction, and provide consistent evaluation parameters that will inform both students and faculty of expectations. Formative assessment results are the purview of the academic program and college and are not reported at the University level although the program may track the information.

**Summative Assessment:** Assessments at this level are intended to provide a true gauge of “outcomes” of the students’ experiences at the University. Results are used to evaluate the extent to which program goals have been achieved. Summative data are generally collected in one to four courses near program completion (except for General Studies courses). Each program includes course-embedded assessments that are conducted in selected courses throughout the program of study. Each course-embedded project, test, portfolio, or other student learning experience may assess several program competencies.

**Direct Evidence:** Direct evidence of student learning indicates whether or not a student has a command of a specific subject content area, can perform a certain task, exhibit a particular skill, demonstrate a certain quality in his/her work, or hold a particular value (Middle States, 2003). Examples of such measures include course homework assignments, term papers and reports, rubrics, research projects, etc. at the course level as well as capstone projects, and employer or supervision ratings of student performance at the program level.

One primary method of assessing student learning is through *course-embedded, criterion-referenced, assessment measures (CECRAM)*. This approach was developed by consensus of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and all College Deans in the year 2000. CECRAM is typically implemented through grading rubrics that are designed to explicate each criterion to be
assessed with an explanation of the product scoring at each performance level from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (excellent).

Additional direct methods are used to assess student learning outcomes and may include:

- Exams with embedded questions (generally used for science or math courses that may be measured on a percentage scoring system),
- Clinical evaluations (generally but not always used in conjunction with a rubric in programs such as nursing and education), and
- Standardized comprehensive exams.

**Indirect Evidence**: Indirect evidence of student learning is correlational -- meaning that data exists which indicates that students are probably learning, but the evidence is less clear than evidence from direct methods (Suskie, 2004). As a result, indirect evidence should not be the only means of assessing outcomes (Middle States, 2003). Examples of indirect methods at the course level include course grades, as well as the time spent on service learning or homework. At the program level, employer or alumni surveys, student perception surveys, and graduate school placement are some examples of indirect evidence.

**Graduation Competencies**: Critical outcomes of the academic experience have been developed by the Faculty Senate and are called competencies (See Appendix B: Graduation Competencies). Educational values have also been developed and may be measured if a specific academic college or academic program chooses to do so. However, a section of each five-year program review must include a section which describes how faculty promotes these values as well as student reflection upon them.

The undergraduate competencies are subdivided into general education and academic program competencies. The general education competencies will be assessed primarily by the
College of Arts & Sciences with the specific academic program assessing the program competencies. The graduate-level competencies are assessed at the program level. Each college has developed a written outcomes assessment plan that delineates the assessment process for each program. In this plan, the terms, University-level proficiency, and advanced level as they pertain to the graduation competencies (see appendix B) should be defined. In addition, an ad hoc Faculty Senate Committee on Information Literacy developed a rubric for use by all academic programs to access Information Literacy.

Student learning outcomes, as reported at the University level, relate to the achievement of the graduation competencies. At the program level, mapping identifies the linkage of graduation competencies, program competencies, course objectives, and assessment measures. The linkages are depicted as follows:

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Graduation Competency → Program Competency → Course Objective → Graded Assignment
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**Data Collection and Implementation Cycle:** “A commitment to assessment of student learning requires a parallel commitment to ensuring its use” (Characteristics, 2006, p.66). The Academic Affairs Outcomes Assessment Plan includes a five-year cycle for data collection and implementation of results. Each academic program is to formally report the status and results of outcomes assessment activities of student learning in its Five-Year Program Review. Faculty reflections, decisions, implementation of actions and results are to be included as part of the review. This process does not mean that assessment activities occur only every five years. Academic colleges integrate assessment throughout each academic year; at different times, there will be a focus on data collection, analysis, reflection, discussion, and use of results.
Certain academic programs at the University are accredited or approved by external agencies which may require a different timetable than the University’s five year program review cycle. Such programs should submit a formal report related to status of outcomes assessment to the Vice President for Academic Affairs of the University on a regularly scheduled basis as determined by the Vice President. All other academic programs follow the five-year assessment cycle listed below.

- Year 1 – Implement findings from program review
- Year 2 – Data collection
- Year 3 – Reflection, take appropriate actions and collect “other kinds” of data
- Year 4 – Data collection
- Year 5 – Program Review Report

Appendix C provides a schedule for assessment activities for each academic program.

A representative sampling of course sections can be utilized for the collection of outcomes assessment data. The following guidelines have been established for representative sampling.

- As a goal, data collection should be statistically meaningful;
- Data should be collected from all course sections if seven or fewer sections are offered in a data collection year.
- All University sites and instructional formats (face-to-face, hybrid, distance-learning, etc.) should be included.

**The Use of Results:** On an annual basis, a presentation will be made to the Faculty Senate providing a status report of assessment of student learning across all academic colleges.
This report will also include a summary of the ways in which outcomes data have been utilized in order to improve student learning.

Therefore, a part of each academic college’s outcomes assessment plan should include specific procedures for gathering data, examining assessment results, reporting and archiving the results, sharing the results with the University community as appropriate (Middle States, 2003) and to celebrate successes (Suskie, 2004).

**Assessment of Teaching Effectiveness:**

Teaching effectiveness is essential to fulfilling the Mission of Wilmington University. Therefore, teaching effectiveness is the second arm of the assessment plan for Academic Affairs. No significant change is recommended for the 2007 revision of the AAP. The basis for assessing teaching effectiveness includes routine GPA reports each semester, the faculty evaluation process, and utilization of IDEA reports and an annual review of institutional results. Students are given the opportunity to provide evaluative data at the conclusion of each course. Teaching effectiveness data are gauged by the items, “Overall excellence of this course” and “Progress on relevant objectives”. Although each faculty is given a written analysis of the course evaluation, an institutional as well as academic college analysis is also provided. Steps will be maintained to ensure that our cycle of data analysis and review continues (course evaluation data collected every term with review of institutional results annually in Spring II and annual full time faculty evaluation process). In addition, an annual GPA analysis will be conducted by Institutional Research. The results of these evaluations will be presented for discussion at Faculty Senate every spring.
Assessment of Student Satisfaction with the Academic Experience:

Wilmington University is a student-centered institution. Student satisfaction with the academic experience is therefore an obvious parameter in our assessment plan. No significant change is recommended for the 2007 revision of the AAP. The basis for this assessment is the ACT University Outcomes Survey which is a standardized survey that is administered to graduating undergraduate and graduate students. One section assesses student satisfaction with various aspects of the University. Institutional Research extracts the items pertaining to the academic experience. Assessment data assist Academic Affairs to gauge the level of satisfaction in such areas as “faculty respect for students” and “faculty availability”. Because this survey has been administered since 2000, we have trended data on student satisfaction. The Academic Council will review the analysis of ACT survey provided by Institutional Research on an annual basis, typically in October.

Guidelines for Benchmarks:

The following guidelines have been established for summative assessments.

- The benchmark for program/graduation competencies should be recorded as a mean score.
- The benchmark for rubric-based assignments at the graduate level is a mean of 4.00. The target for rubric-based assignments for undergraduate programs is a mean of 3.00.
- For data reported as percentage (e.g., comprehensive examination scores), the target for graduate level programs is a mean of 90%. For undergraduate programs reporting data as percentage, the target is a mean of 80%.
➢ The benchmark for teaching effectiveness, as measured by the IDEA results, is that Wilmington University will score at or above the national norm.

➢ The benchmark for student satisfaction with the academic experience, as measured by ACT University Outcomes surveys, is that Wilmington University will score at or above the national norm.

➢ Benchmarks can be changed over time based on reflection upon assessment results.

**Academic Affairs and Institutional Research**

The relationship between Institutional Research (IR) and Academic Affairs is crucial in order to successfully assess student learning at the University. Institutional Research provides indirect measures of instructional effectiveness such as retention and graduation rates for all students and assists with various types of direct measures of student learning. In addition, analytical research projects such as compiling and analyzing data for academic program review, and designing and administering various surveys of students and alumni are supportive of the assessment of student learning.

Below is a list of several ongoing IR projects which relate to the assessment of student learning. This list is dynamic and will change from time to time and serves to illustrate the collaborative working relationship between Academic Affairs and IR.

➢ Assist with the specialized accreditation requirements.

➢ Develop and manage a shared data base for storage of CECRAM data at the academic college level.

➢ Produce and analyze annual reports related to the IDEA student evaluation form.
➢ Develop and analyze regularly scheduled GPA and enrollment reports by academic college.

➢ Collect and analyze data of the relevant information from the ACT survey.

**Plan for Evaluation**

It will become necessary, on a periodic basis, to evaluate the Academic Affairs Outcomes Assessment Plan. The tentative plan for evaluation will be the summer of 2010. A task force will be formed to evaluate the efficacy of the plan; membership will consist of the University’s Academic Council, and the leadership of Institutional Research.
Appendix A

The Evolution of Assessment at Wilmington University

In 2000, Wilmington University began to develop a comprehensive outcomes assessment plan which continues to evolve. Early efforts focused almost entirely upon course-embedded assessment. At that time, several difficult obstacles were encountered and eventually worked through. In 2003, the Academic Affairs Outcomes Assessment Plan (AAP) was written and slightly revised in 2004. Over the years we have implemented nearly every aspect of the plan which included gathering data, drawing conclusions and in some cases, acting upon the results. The AAP identified the year 2006 as a time to evaluate its efficacy and to determine whether or not any modifications were needed.

In January 2006 an initial evaluation of the 2003 AAP was prepared by the Vice President and Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs. It was noted that the workload related to the current plan was excessive. Moreover, a review of new guidelines from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2006) indicated that Wilmington University had a plan that went beyond MSCHE standards. Specifically, MSCHE recommends that assessment be (1) useful, (2) cost-effective, (3) reasonably accurate and truthful, and (4) organized, systematized, and sustained.

Utilizing these criteria the following conclusions were drawn: (1) Wilmington University had an assessment plan that is useful. We had already implemented a few changes based upon results. (2) Our plan was not cost-effective in terms of human resources, particularly for program coordinators. For example, data were to be collected in all sections of targeted courses every time they were offered at every site. With a large cadre of adjunct faculty and large enrollment, it appeared that the assessment process was becoming unwieldy. MSCHE recommends keeping
assessment “simple”, focusing on 3-6 important goals in each program, staggering assessments, and using samples. Our plan was not designed to use student samples nor were the assessments staggered. Additionally, we assessed every program competency, which for some programs totaled 14. (3) Our plan was designed to be truthful and valid, especially with the use of standardized surveys and examinations along with criterion-referenced rubrics. (4) Sustainability was jeopardized because of the volume of data collected and the effort required to collect the data.

In March 2006, the Academic Council and Institutional Research Division of the University further evaluated the AAP process and noted the following accomplishments:

- Competency mapping had been completed for all academic programs;
- Data had been collected for each targeted course;
- Examples of the utilization of outcomes data in order to enhance student learning had been documented by most academic colleges;
- Positive feedback had been received from the Middle States accreditation visit.

This group then considered the AAP with the above referenced Middle States Association (2006) guidelines for assessment and the following was determined:

- The Academic Affairs outcomes assessment process was useful but too ambitious.
- The current process was not cost-effective.
- The process was accurate (“good enough”) (Suskie, 2004, p. 302) and truthful.
- The organization and particularly the sustainability of the process were of concern.

Additional discussion was held later that spring at the Academic Council Retreat and the following decisions were made:
Utilization of a five year data collection and implementation cycle would make the process more cost-effective and sustainable.

Representative sampling would be implemented.

A formal reporting cycle would be included in the program review process.

The current set of undergraduate and graduate graduation competencies would be revised.

The three pronged academic assessment plan remains valid. Wilmington University gathers evidence on three components: teaching effectiveness, student learning, and student satisfaction with the academic experience. Monitoring the quality of academic programs is achieved when student learning outcomes data are compared to established performance standards (benchmarks) for graduation competencies and national scores. Trended data analysis would further help us to monitor quality.

In October 2006, a representative Ad hoc Committee of the Faculty Senate was formed to begin the task of revising the Graduation Competencies. The revised Competencies were approved by the Faculty Senate in March 2007. During the summer of 2007, the revised Academic Affairs Assessment Plan was published.
APPENDIX B

GRADUATION COMPETENCIES

In 1987 the Faculty Senate adopted a list of expected graduation competencies for undergraduate students. Undergraduate and graduate competencies were adopted in November 1994. Both of these sets of competencies were reviewed, revised, and adopted by the Faculty Senate in 2007.

Educational Values

In keeping with the Wilmington University mission of providing career-oriented programs, our "scholar-practitioner" faculty are actively engaged in promoting the following educational values:

Commitment to self-directedness, self discipline and lifelong learning;

Sensitivity to and respect for a pluralistic society;

Awareness of self in relationship to others and the benefits of working in teams;

Appreciation of creative expression including the arts and humanities;

Commitment to responsible citizenship as a contributing member of society.

Undergraduate Competencies

It is intended that students earning an undergraduate degree will demonstrate University-level proficiency in the following areas:

General Education

Oral Communication

- Speak with confidence, clarity, and conciseness.
- Research, prepare, and deliver professional presentations.

Written Communication

- Write clearly, concisely and appropriately using correct English grammar, punctuation, usage, mechanics, sentence structure, and vocabulary.
- Utilize appropriate APA format for scholarly writings.

Disciplined Inquiry
• Utilize quantitative, qualitative and scientific reasoning to solve problems.

• Exercise critical thinking strategies, including reasoning, problem solving, analysis and evaluation.

**Academic Programs**

Each academic program has specified competencies in the following areas:

• Information literacy as related to one's academic discipline.

• Ethics as related to one's academic discipline.

• Three or four additional program competencies as determined by the academic college.

**Note:** Additional competencies may be included as per external accreditation requirements.

**Graduate Competencies**

It is intended that students will have an advanced level of applicable knowledge in the following areas as appropriate to one's field of study:

**Oral Communication**

• Speak with confidence, clarity, and conciseness.

• Research, prepare, and deliver professional presentations.

**Written Communication**

• Write clearly, concisely and appropriately using correct English grammar, punctuation, usage, mechanics, sentence structure, and vocabulary.

• Utilize appropriate APA format for scholarly writings.

**Disciplined Inquiry**

• Utilize quantitative, qualitative and scientific reasoning to solve problems.

• Exercise critical thinking strategies, including reasoning, problem solving, analysis and evaluation.

• Define a problem or issue and develop questions and methods to address the problem or issue and/or to create new knowledge.
**Information Literacy**
- Access and use information effectively, efficiently, and appropriately.
- Evaluate the quality of sources and content.
- Use technology to effectively locate and communicate information.

**Ethics**
- Demonstrate knowledge and application of prescribed ethical code(s) and/or behaviors promoted by the profession.

**Additional Program Competencies**
- Two or three additional Program Competencies as prescribed by the Academic College.

**Note:** Additional competencies may be included as per external accreditation requirements.
## Academic Affairs Program Review Cycle

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PR = Program Review  
NC = NCATE Review  
IA = IACBE Review  
CA = CCREP Review  
NL = NLNAC Review  
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Outcomes Assessment Cycle Year
## GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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