

Husson University
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ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT RESOURCE MANUAL

For Academic Departments and Programs

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INTRODUCTION

The Institutional Wide Academic Assessment Committee was formed in the fall of 2012 to help create and foster an assessment community and an assessment plan for all of Husson University. The purpose of this manual is to aid faculty, department heads and deans in completing their assessment activities as outlined in Husson's Institutional Assessment Plan. The committee and the Department of Institutional Research are available to help you during all parts of course, program and school wide assessment. The committee's role is to advise, advocate, motivate, educate, coordinate and review assessment reports.

WHY ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING?

Husson University's mission is to inspire and prepare students for professional careers in current and emerging fields within the context of an education informed by the sciences and humanities. To reach its mission Husson's strategic plan has as its core priority to transform student lives and insure success. To support the mission and strategic plan we strive to provide outstanding teaching and undergraduate and graduate curriculum that is challenging, relevant, and promotes critical thinking skills, self-confidence and strong communication skills. It is not enough for the instructors to present the material; they must evaluate their teaching efforts. Assessment of student learning allows programs to view themselves realistically and objectively, to monitor student learning initiatives, and to make corrections and improvements toward this goal of educational excellence. Therefore, assessment of student learning is at the heart of professional improvement, it advances creativity and effective instruction going well beyond mere compliance measures of accreditation.

WHAT IS PROGRAM ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING?

Program assessment requires gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data to demonstrate students' knowledge, skills and accomplishments, i.e., student learning outcomes. It allows for data driven decision making to lead program development. It deals with a set of steps that are repeated over time in an unending cycle.

To assess a program, the individual courses that make up the program will need to be assessed and mapped to the program outcomes in order to confirm that the courses are aligned and support the program outcomes.

Steps to assessing a Program OR Concentration (examples: mathematics, general education)

1. Identify program goals
2. Identify student learning outcomes for each goal
3. Map course goals to program goals and identify gaps
4. Adjust goals and outcomes as needed
5. Decide which outcomes will be assessed during the coming school year
5. Identify how you will assess each outcome for a given goal = identify assessment tools

6. Prepare plan for getting these assessments completed during next semester/school year
7. Implement assessments and gather data
8. Analyze data
9. Decide if each outcome is met or not, or cannot be determined
10. If met, determine at which level
11. Identify gaps and devise changes for improvement
12. Implement changes and reassess along with additional outcomes

Steps to assessing an individual Course

1. Identify course goals
2. Map course goals to program goals and student learning outcomes, identify competencies and gaps and rework goals if necessary
3. Identify student learning outcomes for each goal
4. Identify at which level each outcome is covered
5. List assessment tools that will be used to measure each outcome for a given goal
6. Implement assessment tools in class and collect data
7. Analyze data
8. Decide if each outcome is met, not met or cannot be determined and if met, identify level at which students meet the outcome
9. Devise changes for improvement to course and adjust outcomes and goals if necessary
10. If goals at course or program level change then return to step 2, if not, return to step 5

The purpose of this continuous cycle of activity is to improve student learning and development, program curricula and faculty development.

WHO ASSESSES STUDENT LEARNING?

The primary responsibility for assessment of student learning is at the department or program level. Plans to assess student learning should be created and carried out by the faculty within the program offering the degree. Assessment of student learning across schools and colleges is the responsibility of all faculty, chairs, deans and the University Assessment committee. The University Assessment committee, the General Education committee and faculty who teach general education courses should work together to assess the general education outcomes.

Faculty are encouraged to become involved in the process of assessment from the beginning as their role is critical to the assessment cycle. Department or program members design the student learning outcomes and ways to measure those outcomes in order to own the process and be more accepting of the results and what those results indicate. Faculty will come to realize that assessment will help them to develop their own skills and abilities in the classroom as well as enhance student learning. In addition, assessment provides evidence that supports curricular change and helps make a case for additional resources. As much as possible, assessment should be integrated into the regular activities of the department and include all faculty.

Faculty members within each program or department will review the results of their assessment measures yearly to assess the success of their program or department. While programs and departments are primarily responsible for assessment, the University Assessment Committee, the Director of Institutional Research and the Director of Assessment are here to provide considerable support in this process.

Assessment of student learning involves both internal and external measures. The Director of Institutional Research is responsible for the administration of external assessment tools that examine large cohorts of the student body. Results from national surveys such as ACT, CIRP, FSSE and NSSE are located on a Google site. These results along with information on Husson's student body, including enrollment, retention and graduation statistics, will be located on the Institutional Research website starting the fall of 2014.

WHEN DOES STUDENT ASSESSMENT OCCUR?

Assessment of student learning should occur regularly, every semester as an ongoing project. Programs and departments should decide during their annual assessment meeting which student learning outcomes they will assess each semester during the upcoming year and individual faculty should determine which outcomes from which courses they will be assessing during a given semester.

To assess growth of knowledge and progress towards learning outcomes, students need to be assessed at various stages during their academic careers. Thus the same assessment tools may be used several times during a student's time in the program.

The university has a five-year reporting cycle as presented in the University Assessment Plan. Each program and department submits an updated assessment report covering all student learning outcomes to the University Assessment Committee every five years. This report is reviewed extensively by the Dean and the Provost in addition to the University Assessment Committee. For non-reporting years, each program and department submits a shorter version of the report to their dean and Assessment Google site, discussing what was assessed that year and the plan for what will be assessed in the upcoming year. By planning ahead and sharing this plan programs will be able to seek help from the Office of Institutional Research and be informed as to what data is being collected across the university during a given year. In addition, ineffective and unproductive plans can be restructured.

HOW TO SELECT GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Student level outcomes need to be specified at the university wide level down to the course level. Currently we have some outcomes for all courses and most programs. In addition we have university and program goals that deal with how well our students do as a whole, for example, retention and graduation rates. Each level of outcomes must support the others. Student outcomes at the course level support the program outcomes which in turn support the college and university wide outcomes. General education outcomes support program, college

and university wide goals. Thus, our student learning outcomes build upon each other to help create an all-around transformed student.

There are many things to keep in mind when creating student learning outcomes. First it must be understood that these are outcomes that an individual student should reach or attain by the time he/she graduates. Second, student learning outcomes need to be meaningful, manageable and measurable. When creating outcomes consider what a graduate of the program should know, understand, and be able to do and what values and attitudes the program wants to grow and prosper in the students.

A meaningful outcome is one that supports the program or departments goals.

A manageable outcome is one that is realistic - students can reach it in the allotted time

A measurable outcome is one where we can validly measure the outcome, actually measure the characteristic, skill or knowledge that we seek. The outcome must first be definable, clear and understandable.

In addition, when selecting outcomes consider the following questions:

Is the outcome important -does it really reflect what a student needs to be a successful or transformed student or successful at the next level?

Is the outcome essential or merely interesting?

Is the outcome repetitive?

Can we influence changes in this outcome?

Does the outcome encourage students to engage their studies at an appropriate level? (Depth of Knowledge)

Does the outcome advance appropriate levels of learning such as synthesis or creativity? (Hierarchy of Learning)

HOW TO SELECT ASSESSMENT TOOLS

A goal is only as good as the measurement tool that is used. An assessment tool should be clear and understandable, non-repetitive, and contain information (gather data) that can be used to measure improvement. Evidence of student learning should be collected through both direct and indirect methods. The combination of the two allow for a more comprehensive view of what students have learned and how they have learned it. Each program and department will choose at least two direct and two indirect measurements and at least one measurement must include a trustworthy external perspective.

The following definitions come from the NEASC Commission on Institution of Higher Education's Self-Study Guide, pages 24-25. (<http://cihe.neasc.org/cihe-publications/self-study-guide-2013>)

Direct methods reveal student attainment of knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes, and values.

Indirect methods gather the perceptions of students and others about what students have learned, and opinions and reflections about the teaching and learning process as well as indications of what factors affect student learning.

Examples of direct and indirect measurements of STUDENT LEARNING:

Direct

Course assignments
 Standardized tests
 Pre and post-tests
 Essay tests across programs uniformly graded
 Internships: supervisor surveys
 internships/enrichment
 Passing rates on licensure exams
 Portfolios

Indirect

Student surveys, focus groups
 Exit surveys and interviews
 Alumni and employer surveys
 % go on to graduate school, job placement
 Participation rate in

 Performance in professional competitions
 Retention and transfer rates

The Guiding Principles of Assessment of Student Learning

- Assessments measure students' attainment of learning outcomes.
- Assessments measure the level of student success.
- There should be a connection between the way students learn the material and the way they are tested on it.
- Assessments should be varied.
- Assessments include formal and informal evaluations.
- Students should know the evaluation plan at the beginning of a course.

Once a cycle of data has been collected on each assessment tool then outcomes and goals can be reassessed, as well as the measurement tool.

HOW TO COLLECT DATA

Assessment tools can be used in the classroom and administered orally or by paper and pencil or online following the same guidelines used for any testing procedures. Outside the classroom assessments can be conducted by the program and by the Office of Institutional Research. Working with the Office of Institutional Research will help alleviate duplicate work as well as help to make sure tools are valid and reliable. No matter what type of assessment is used it is important for faculty members to provide clear instructions to the students. Data will be collected by individual faculty, programs and the Office of Institutional Research. Data from the latter will be posted on the IR website. The data to be collected should be described in the previous year's assessment report and will depend on what student learning outcomes are the focus of assessment for the given year. With planning, communication and understanding, data collection need not be cumbersome. When possible, use data that already exists or is being collected by others, such as the Office of Institutional Research. Data may be collected through exams, surveys, essays, portfolios, etc. Such data will need to be entered into a database such as Excel or Access in order to analyze it and store it for future analyses. Commercial software products exist to help you store and analyze your assessment data. The Director of Assessment should be contacted for more information and before purchasing any new products.

HOW TO ANALYZE AND REVIEW THE RESULTS

A key step in assessment is converting the data to information that will allow reviewers to see how well the students' are succeeding with the stated learning outcomes. Data can be summarized by computing averages and percents, and by comparing such descriptive statistics across terms and between different cohorts of students.

Establishing benchmarks by using past data and/or data from other institutions or national summaries allows a comparison for current and future data. Setting standards and projections and viewing trends over time helps to realize how successful your students have been.

Once standards have been met a program may up the level of critical thinking or be satisfied and move on to concentrate on other outcomes, but programs should still continue to monitor results to make sure successful outcomes remain so.

If students are not successful at a given outcome or perform below their peers all related data should be examined as well as the assessment tools and the outcome itself. Changes to a course or curriculum should be made or changes to the assessment tool or perhaps the outcome needs to be altered.

The Office of Institutional Research is available to analyze your data using statistical methods if such assistance is appropriate.

The most important result of assessment is the discussion among the members of the program or department as they review their data and data summaries. Data stimulates discussion which fosters stronger communication and cohesion and leads to an improved program.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE THE RESULTS

The Annual Program Reports will provide a summary of the assessment activities over the past year and what was learned from those activities. The report should include, but is not limited to, the following:

1. program mission statement
2. program's student learning outcomes
3. program's goals for the previous year
4. summary of how each goal was met or not met and why
5. program goal's for coming year
6. identify what student learning outcomes will be assessed during coming year

This information may be presented in a matrix table or as a written report.

The report should be reviewed by all faculty in the program or a representative committee before it is shared outside of the program. All reports will be due the end of May each year. It is the responsibility of the department chair or program director or dean, if there is no chair or director, to report on assessment.

You are encouraged to share your findings with everyone in your department, with related departments, deans, the Provost and the University Assessment Committee. Post your report on the Assessment Google site. During an official review year you must submit a full report to the Assessment Committee. These reports should be uploaded to the Assessment Google site. Reminders to complete and upload your report or matrix will be sent to the deans and directors.

WHO READS THE REPORTS?

During a program's official reporting year, their full report is reviewed by the University Assessment Committee, the Deans, and by Senior Cabinet. Responses are returned and addressed if necessary. The University Assessment Committee will create a report summarizing all programs and submit it to the Provost along with each programs original report. Every 10 years the most recent reports will be submitted as part of the NEASC Self-Study Report. Every year the most recent report and matrix will be posted on the Assessment Google site and the Institutional Research website.

Reports may be used for strategic planning and resource allocation decisions. Reports that suggest the program is having difficulty in assessment efforts will receive help from the University Assessment Committee and the Director of Assessment, who will work with them to create a new assessment plan.

HOW TO ACT ON THE RESULTS

Once the need for improvement has been identified by reviewing the results appropriate action should be taken by the faculty. This may take the form of changing course content, adding or deleting courses, creating or eliminating educational experiences in the program or other initiatives. This does not imply that the department knows the answer to the problem, but only shows that they are willing to try some action to improve. It is important to document what changes you plan on making in your yearly assessment plan. Then later you can assess whether your changes were effective.

WHERE DO WE GO FOR HELP?

The University Assessment Committee is available to help and support a program at any point during their assessment journey. A current roster of the committee and several assessment tutorials are available on the Institutional Research website under Assessment Resources. <http://www.husson.edu/office-of-institutional-research>