

Quality

Endeavors

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How Do We Know We Are Making a Difference?

Renata Engel, Chair of the Coordinating Committee on University Assessment (CCUA) charged by the Provost in 2005 to develop a university-wide plan for the assessment of student learning and on-going responsibility to facilitate the implementation of the plan, has provided the following information on the status of the plan and an upcoming discussion on its implementation.

“How do we know we are making a difference?” is the title of the series of editorials that Trudy Banta writes for *Assessment Update*. In the series, she summarizes the approaches at various academic institutions known for their outstanding work in outcomes assessment. The question is also what the members of the Coordinating Committee on University Assessment (CCUA) asked throughout their work to develop a plan for the assessment of student learning at Penn State. Coincidentally, “Making a difference” also happens to be the tagline for Penn State. So how do we know we are making a difference?

The question fits every program, every course, and every activity that has a learning goal—regardless of whether the program is long-standing or part of a new initiative. The challenge that we—faculty, staff, academic leaders and administrators—face is not whether to assess student learning (we do a great deal of it already), but how to do it effectively. This means that we have to identify the questions that really matter, gather the most relevant data, explore ways to use that data to make good learning related decisions, and continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the approaches. Our goal is to provide the very best educational experiences that we can for all of

our students. The goal can be daunting unless we realize that we can tackle it together with a strategy for assessment that cuts across all programs and recognizes assessment at every level—from course through program.

To tackle the challenge, the CCUA developed a plan which forms a foundation and a framework for assessment of student learning. Specifically, the March 2006 draft of the Assessment Plan for Student Learning (<http://www.psu.edu/vpaa/Middle%20States/mdl%20states.htm>) includes descriptions and goals for assessment at the institutional level, and within specific programs, such as general education, cocurricular, and academic, as well as practices and approaches at the course-level. It may be helpful to view the foundation as the set of guiding principles that are included in the plan, and the framework as the description of the spheres of assessment and the short term goals in each sphere. From this foundation and framework, academic and administrative units—faculty and staff—can build assessments, relevant to the programs for which they are responsible.

Threaded throughout the plan is the need for communication and the sharing of knowledge and experience. To carry the plan to the next stage of refinement and implementation, the members of the Coordinating Committee on University Assessment (CCUA) invite the Penn State community to a dialogue about assessment of student learning on May 16, 2006. The details are below.

QUALITY ADVOCATES

NEW! Assessment of Student Learning: A Dialogue

Tuesday, May 16, 2006
2:00 – 3:30 p.m.
404 Old Main

The Coordinating Committee on University Assessment (CCUA) would like to explore topics related to the March 2006 draft of the Assessment Plan for Student Learning (<http://www.psu.edu/vpaa/Middle%20States/mdl%20states.htm>) which forms a foundation and framework for assessment of student learning, and how faculty, staff and administrators see themselves participating in carrying forward various elements of the assessment plan. Join the discussion to share or learn about approaches to identify the questions that really matter, what resources are needed to gather the most relevant data, and how to use that data to make good learning related decisions.

The discussion will be moderated by Renata Engel, Executive Director, Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence and Associate Dean for Teaching Excellence and Professor, Engineering Science and Mechanics and Engineering Design

Quality Advocates discussions are open to any member of the University community who has an interest in planning, improvement, or assessment. If you would like to attend this event, please call the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment at 814-863-8721 or email psupia@psu.edu.

Penn State campuses interested in participating in Quality Advocates via videoconference should contact the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment.

2006 QUALITY ISSUES FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

Penn State's annual Quality Issues Forum, sponsored by the Executive Vice President and Provost and the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment, recognized 38 teams and approximately 280 individuals from 13 University units for their contributions to innovation and improvement at Penn

State. More information about the Forum is available at <http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/qif>. More information about the more than 700 quality teams and innovation initiatives at Penn State since 1991 is available at <http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/database>.

Keynote Speaker

At the annual Quality Issues Forum on April 26, 2006, keynote speaker Jim Buckman, Co-Director, Joseph M. Juran Center for Leadership in Quality (<http://www.carlsonschool.umn.edu/Page5309.aspx>), Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota, in a speech titled "Sustaining the Quality Advantage: Your Role in the Revolution," discussed the role of quality improvement in higher education. Mr. Buckman reviewed the core concepts and values of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award:



- Visionary leadership that is directed toward greatness
- Customer-focused orientation
- Management innovation, organizational learning and personal learning
- Valuing employees and partners
- Agility to respond to changing environments
- Decision making based on data
- Social responsibility for the greater good
- Focus on results and creating value
- Systems perspective for the whole enterprise

and pointed out that we should all be able to identify our activities as adding value. He talked about the purpose of higher education:

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As people in universities, we preserve the knowledge and wisdom of the past...We help discover knowledge for a brighter future...We develop leaders for a brighter future...That's it. If we're doing something that doesn't connect to those ideas pretty directly, I think we should ask "Why? Why are we doing it?"

According to Mr. Buckman, if we're "really locked on to our purpose" we should be enjoying our jobs.

Penn State 2006 Juran Fellowship and Juran Doctoral Award Recipients

The Joseph M. Juran Center for Leadership in Quality annually selects and honors doctoral students who, upon graduation, are expected to contribute at leading institutions, fueling and broadening quality thinking in their chosen field. These graduate students conduct rigorous and important research on the topic of quality beginning with their doctoral studies. Award recipients for 2006 from Penn State were recognized at the Quality Issues Forum.



Penn State Juran Fellowship and Juran Doctoral Award Recipients: front row, left to right, Betty Harper and Nina Vyatkina; back row, left to right, Brad Beauvais, Tanuj Motwani, and Leidy Klotz.

The following graduate students from Penn State have been named as recipients of the 2006 Juran Fellow Award, receiving a \$10,000 grant from the Juran Center.

- Brad Beauvais, Health Policy and Administration, "Does Money Really Matter? The Effects of Health Organization Finances on Quality of Care"

- Nina Vyatkina, German, Applied Linguistics, Foreign Language Education, "Continuous Improvement of Second Language Pragmatic Competence: Data-Driven Teaching Based on a Learner Corpus"

The following graduate students from Penn State have been named as recipients of the 2006 Juran Doctoral Award, receiving a \$2,500 grant from the Juran Center, matched by a \$2,500 grant from the Provost.

- Betty Harper, Higher Education, "An Investigation of the Role of Continuous Improvement Activities in Promoting Student Learning"
- Leidy Klotz, Architectural Engineering, "Continuously Improving Green Buildings: Using Quality Principles to Identify Valuable Green Building Delivery Process Features"
- Tanuj Motwani, Food Science, "Development of a Dielectric Spectroscopy Based Technique for Online Monitoring of Tempering during Chocolate Manufacturing: A Quality Improvement Approach"

SUPPORT FOR PLANNING, IMPROVEMENT, AND ASSESSMENT IN YOUR UNIT

The Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment is available to consult with units and facilitate the implementation of Penn State's strategic priorities. It is the Office's mission to support the University's efforts to plan, assess, and improve programs and services. The Office uses organizational change tools to help units assess their needs, develop strategic plans, improve key processes, and develop collaborative team environments. There is no charge for the Office's consultation services. If you would like to discuss the planning, quality, or assessment needs of your unit with one of our consultants, please contact the Office at 814-863-8721 or e-mail les1@psu.edu.