

SENATE COUNCIL

Penn State's Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning

(Informational)

Background

In 2005 Penn State underwent a review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Penn State chose the theme 'teaching and learning in undergraduate education' as the focus. In preparation of the review a detailed self study was conducted which identified the need for "systematic, evidence-based assessment." Consequently, the Provost formed and charged the Coordinating Committee on University Assessment (CCUA) to develop a university-wide plan for the assessment of student learning and to facilitate the implementation of the plan. In April 2006, President Spanier communicated *The Pennsylvania State University Assessment Plan for Student Learning* to the Middle States Commission for Higher Education. This report provides an overview of the plan and summarizes the activities proposed for 2006-2007.

Scope of the Plan and Activities for 2005-2007

Penn State, like other institutions, has been engaged in a variety of assessment activities, thus the plan builds upon those existing approaches to establish a foundation of effective and efficient practices. A set of guiding principles sets the stage by communicating the value of assessment, the focus of activities, ownership, methods of assessment and how assessment can be applied to enrich the learning experiences of students. The plan organizes goals and activities in spheres that range from institutional level assessment through course level assessment, with attention on general education, co-curriculum, and discipline-specific programs—academic programs that have frequent and formal reviews (e.g., engineering, education, nursing, business) as well as those that do not have regular external evaluations.

Putting the plan into practice requires the partnership of faculty and staff in academic units, administrative and support offices, and the Faculty Senate. Close cooperation and leadership from these units will foster a strong culture of assessment—one that supports seeking answers to questions to improve the learning experience. The initial (2006-2007) efforts summarized in this report address the full scope of activity from institutional to course level, via the Blended Learning Initiative Assessment Task Force and the Assessment Academy, respectively. The General Education portion focuses attention on providing additional data to support understanding the extent to which students are achieving program goals related to critical thinking. Cocurriculum assessment activities employ the recently defined program goals to identify measures for targeted initiatives in career planning and multicultural learning. The wide variation in assessment practices associated with academic programs lends itself to communicating the proposed academic program assessment guideline to academic leaders and faculty, with the intent of refining it, supporting its use, and reporting its effectiveness in the coming years. Parallel to these activities, is the development of a website which will include a database of resources, information about workshops, opportunities for support, and venues for discussion.

2005-2006 Coordinating Committee on University Assessment

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Relevant Documents

[Teaching and Learning in Undergraduate Education at Penn State: An Institutional Self Study](#),
February 23, 2005

[The Middle State's Team Report](#), April 2005

[The Pennsylvania State University Assessment Plan for Student Learning](#), April 2006

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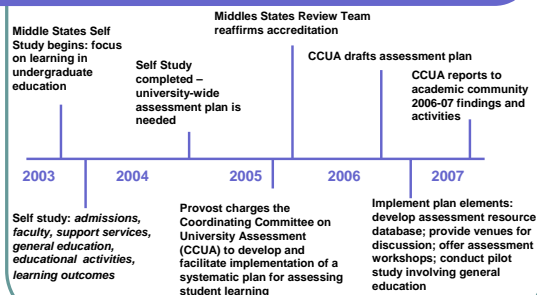
Bonj Szczygiel

Penn State's Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning

A presentation and opportunity for discussion with the Faculty Senate on September 12, 2006

Renata S. Engel, Chair, Coordinating Committee on University Assessment

Timeline



The Plan

- Principles – frames the plan
 - Value; Focus and Ownership; Methodology; Application
- Spheres of assessment – provides scope and order
 - Institutional level—links to university's strategic goals
 - General Education Program—acknowledges unique experience for each student
 - Cocurricular Program—identifies learning outcomes
 - Academic Programs—includes those with and without regular or external reviews via program accreditations
 - Course level—presents opportunities to share practices
- Goals and 5-Year Plan – prioritizes activities
- CCUA – refines the standing responsibilities

2006-2007 Sample Activities

- Supporting assessment projects
 - Blended learning initiative assessment plan
 - designed for sustained use
 - Pilot study to explore select general education goals (using Collegiate Learning Assessment to complement other data)
 - focuses on critical thinking and written communication
 - make or break an argument and performance task (CLA)
 - explores how students meet general education goals
 - Establish measures for cocurricular learning outcomes and apply them to multicultural learning and career development initiatives

2006-2007 Sample Activities

- Building resources
 - Assessment resource database: surveys, tools
 - Website: reviews (e-portfolio project), reports, conference list
 - Assessment Academy workshop
- Fostering discussion
 - Venues: Quality Advocates Network, Faculty Senate, Academic leadership groups; Student Affairs
 - Topics: Student-centered learning, Cocurricular learning outcomes, Assessments that matter

Faculty Senate Role

- Leadership – from self-study through plan development
 - 2 members of Faculty Senate on CCUA
- Communication – venues for discussion
 - Faculty Senate leadership met in November 2005 with CCUA to discuss General Education
 - R. Pangborn and R. Engel met with Commonwealth Campus Caucus in April 2006 to discuss plan
- Participation and guidance – identifying assessment priorities and implementation via curriculum review
 - e.g., General education program goals, first-year experience, multicultural and international learning