

August 3, 2009

2009 CHHS Annual Dean's Report on the Measurement of Student Learning Outcomes for Ongoing Program Improvement

1. The TRACDAT assessment impact reports are available online
2. The memoranda from the chairs/directors of departments/units containing their assessment reports to the dean have been submitted along with this report via email attachment
3. Memorandum from Dean Earlie Washington to Provost Tim Greene, answering three questions:
 - a. For each department/unit and using the evidence provided by the departments/units and other information available to the dean, evaluate the extent and effectiveness of each unit in using student learning outcomes results for:
 1. Informing planning at the department level
 2. Revising goals for programs
 3. Articulating or aligning curriculum with new or established partnerships (e.g., K-12, community colleges)
 4. Changing policies for admission or for transfer into programs
 5. Preparing self-studies for specialized program accreditation
 6. Other uses not listed above

OVERVIEW:

The College of Health and Human Services has implemented assessment of student learning plans in each of its programs. CHHS also has made significant progress during the 2008-2009 academic year in using assessment results for planning, curriculum realignment, altering admission policies, and for preparing for accreditation. The college historically has had a solid foundation in assessment, due in large part to the significant assessment-related requirements of our various program accrediting bodies. Three of four undergraduate programs are accredited, along with all of our Master's programs and one of two doctoral programs. Accrediting agencies in the health and human services disciplines require that continuous program improvement plans are developed and implemented. Assessment of student learning outcomes is a fundamental aspect of this improvement process.

Assessment activity in the college also has been enhanced this year by work related to the full implementation of the TRACDAT software system. The use of TRACDAT has stimulated many of our programs to reassess their assessment outcomes and measures, to ensure that data collection and analysis plans are in place, and, perhaps most importantly, to use assessment results in the curriculum revision process. For example,

some of our programs have re-evaluated their extensive reliance on course grades as outcome measures, and have worked to focus outcomes assessment on other, more specific outcomes. Programs also have invested in developing rubrics that permit more objective evaluation of outcomes. Finally, programs have worked to ensure that criteria for outcomes are explicit both at the individual level and the aggregate, or program level. In the past, some of our outcomes were vague, overly broad, lacked rubrics, or lacked criteria for success at both individual (what is success for this outcome for a given student?) and aggregate (how many students must meet this outcome for the program to be considered successful in this area?). Finally, the support of the office of Student Academic and Institutional Research (SAIR) has also been instrumental in improving our assessment work, particularly in the superb support for the TRACDAT transition provided by SAIR's Karen Stokes.

1. Informing planning at the department level

At the department level, planning is used primarily to identify ways to improve the functioning of the department in areas such as admissions, advising and student support (which cut across specific program areas). It also aids in identifying overarching instructional goals (such as cultural competency or research skills), identifying training needs (e.g., for part time instructors), and identifying new program opportunities and the resources needed to support them (e.g., research development, new programs).

This year, several departments/programs have undertaken planning efforts supported by assessment of student learning:

- a. In Holistic Health, for example, faculty incorporated assessment of student learning into a comprehensive curriculum review and curricular mapping process that helped to clarify program objectives and aided in relating program objectives to course objectives. Subcommittees have been designated to evaluate learning objectives in biofeedback, nutrition, spirituality and other areas. This broad-based program review, which has just been completed, will contribute to the planned revision of the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the Holistic Health certificate program in the upcoming year. The assessment plan for the undergraduate minor in Holistic Health will be completed in the upcoming academic year as well.
- b. The Specialty Program in Alcohol and Drug Addiction implements a completely revised curriculum this year that is the result of significant changes in this discipline. Assessment data were used to guide the revision of this program at WMU.
- c. In Social Work, assessment results were used in department to identify topics that needed strengthening across the various program offerings. Social policy, social justice and critical thinking skills development were identified as targets for improvement as a result of this departmental level review of assessment data.

- d. In Occupational Therapy, assessment results helped to identify the need and build the case for expansion of the Master's program to the Grand Rapids campus and were used in developing the Academic Program Plan last year.
- e. In Speech Pathology and Audiology, departmental level planning, supported by assessment, revealed the need to revise the Master's program in speech and language pathology to provide a more "generalist" approach without elective tracks.
- f. Physician Assistant eliminated its departmental level objective of serving medically underserved individuals, as assessment data revealed that students are not seeking employment in this area and securing clinical sites that serve this population is difficult.
- g. In the upcoming year, Blindness and Low Vision plans to use assessment data obtained from the national certification exam to identify areas across the departments' four programs that need to be strengthened.

As noted above, assessment has aided departmental-level planning in CHHS during the past year. However, assessment of student learning focuses largely on refinement of teaching and learning in specific programs within departments, rather than on supporting planning at the departmental level. There is a need in the college and the university to expand our view of assessment to include assessment for planning purposes, with emphasis on unit-wide service effectiveness and the establishment of new courses and programs and the elimination of existing ones.

2. Revising goals for programs

There are many examples of revision of program goals during the recently completed academic year that are related to CHHS assessment efforts. Several of our academic units, notably Social Work and Nursing, have created explicit mechanisms for linking assessment of student learning outcomes to the curriculum change process. In Social Work, feedback logs are sent from the assessment committee to the curriculum committees charged with curriculum review. Issues addressed via assessment of student learning include integration of textbook content across faculty and support for adjunct faculty. Social work also determined, by analyzing assessment data, that MSW students in the Interpersonal Practice concentration were not achieving a foundational objective in analysis of social policy. This assessment finding in turn led to a review of course content to ensure related learning objectives were being addressed. Finally, social work has noted that assessment reports are provided to faculty at the beginning of the academic year, rather than at the end, so that assessment results can be utilized throughout the academic year.

The Bronson School of Nursing has one of the most well-developed assessment systems in the college. Their assessment committee meets monthly, and a member of the committee sits on the curriculum committee for the department. Findings are reported to the faculty regularly, which helps to reinforce the value of assessment activity. In regard to specific changes made as a result of assessment, the School of

Nursing revealed that students were receiving less-than-desirable scores on a standardized test of pharmacology knowledge. As a result, significant changes in pharmacology instruction were implemented. Nursing, like almost all CHHS programs, makes use of licensing and certification exam scores in various topical areas as markers of student learning. (NCLEX scores increased from an average of 76.9% in 2007 to 94.7% in 2008, an indication that the program is focusing instruction appropriately on the core requirements of the profession). CHHS is fortunate to have certification and licensure exams in most of our fields, as they are reliable, valid measurement tools (whose scores are available in aggregate) for assessment of student learning. The tests are supplemented by other measures that enrich our ability to interpret the test data (e.g., alumni and employer survey data).

In the Physician Assistant program, assessment data brought about a realignment of course content, with greater emphasis on practice of psychomotor skills such as injections and IV starts. PA faculty also have increased their use of case-based material as a result of assessment feedback from students. In Speech and Language Pathology, the faculty have elected to design their assessment around the Knowledge and Skill Acquisition matrix that forms the basis for program accreditation in this field. This alignment of university requirements for student learning assessment with that of the accrediting body is efficient and appears to meet the needs of both constituents. The SPPA report describes a number of specific changes to courses that were stimulated by assessment, including realignment of material related to cleft palate and cochlear implants.

The faculty and administration of CHHS has actively engaged the assessment of student learning process this past year. The university mandate to begin using TRACDAT software this year helped to increase the level of energy surrounding assessment. Several departments have exemplary assessment plans; plans with clear outcomes, diverse approaches to measurement, and strategies for linking assessment to curriculum planning. These departments include Speech Pathology and Audiology, Nursing, Social Work, and Physician Assistant. Occupational Therapy, Blindness and Low Vision, and Holistic Health programs need additional work and improvement. Some of these programs merely need to add their assessment findings to TRACDAT, while others need to work on developing a diverse set of objective measures of outcomes and the linkage of outcomes assessment to the curriculum change process. The departments have put considerable effort into moving away from course grades as primary measures of learning to the use of more targeted measures of academic performance, such as capstone projects. The departments also are credited for using diverse assessment measures, including alumni, employer and student surveys. Departments rely heavily on graduates' scores on various subtests on certification and licensure examinations. The College is fortunate to have these tools, which are an excellent fit with the goals of outcomes measurement.

3. Articulating or aligning curriculum with new or established partnerships (e.g., K-12, community colleges)

The Holistic Health program is establishing an upper level general education course in partnership with the Lee Honors College. This course was stimulated by assessment data gathered by LHC and supported by CHHS Holistic Health assessment data. This is a prime example of cross-college program development that was driven by assessment of student learning. Holistic Health hopes to expand its presence in the various CHHS programs, and assessment will be an important ingredient in determining the impact of this expansion on student learning. Also, the expansion of the Occupational Therapy program to the Grand Rapids campus was supported by assessment data (although not directly related to assessment of student learning outcomes). The Blindness and Low Vision department is pursuing a partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs blind rehabilitation units. One area of instruction that is important to VA units is adaptive keyboarding and computer skills. Learning outcomes assessment data for students in the Department of Blindness and Low Vision's vision rehabilitation therapy program showed that graduates were not as competent in this area as desired. The department plans to remediate this deficit, with the goal of making graduates more desirable employees for VA units. The Bronson School of Nursing maintains clinical contacts with about 150 health care agencies in SW Michigan for purposes of providing clinical experiences for students. Assessment data are critical for ensuring that these clinical sites are satisfied with the skills and knowledge of our students. Surveys are a key way of gathering these data.

4. Changing policies for admission or for transfer into programs

Nursing has completed a formal review of admission criteria and have increased the required GPA for admission as a result. Holistic Health now requires successful completion of HOL 5310 for admission to its certificate program. The performance of students in this course provides additional information for the admission decision.

5. Preparing self-studies for specialized program accreditation

As noted above, specialized program accreditation plays a key role in CHHS. Because of accreditation requirements, our programs had detailed systems in place for evaluating student learning outcomes long before the university began to encourage assessment practices. Our program accreditation work continues to support our university-driven assessment practices, not the other way around. This is particularly evident in social work, nursing and speech pathology and audiology. The long history of assessment in the accreditation arena has made it relatively easy for the college units to meet the university requirements for assessment of student learning outcomes.

6. Other uses not listed above

b. Evaluate the extent and effectiveness of college-level leadership and support for the use of learning outcomes results to improve student learning:

1. Since July 1, 2005, what documented commitment of resources (physical, fiscal, human, and technological) has the college made to advance a culture of learning? With what outcomes?
In August of 2007, the College appointed a full-time Associate Dean. One of the responsibilities explicitly stated in the job description of the Associate Dean is to manage the college assessment program. Since 2007, the Associate Dean has met regularly with individuals from each department responsible for assessment. The College Assessment committee also meets regularly. The Associate Dean has provided TRACDAT training, with support from Karen Stokes. The AD also has accompanied many of our assessment committee members during meetings with Dr Kathy Cummings. These meetings focused on development of outcomes and measures. Support was provided for our new faculty member who leads the undergraduate interdisciplinary program to attend an assessment conference in Indiana. Finally, since 2007, the Dean has allocated a Graduate Assistant position in the Dean's office to assist departments with assessment-related data entry and analysis. This GA has been a valuable asset to departmental faculty with assessment responsibilities as they make the transition to TRACDAT.
2. For 2008-09, were resources allocated to academic units based in part at least on the results of student learning outcomes?
No
3. Does the college academic advising unit have a documented plan to regularly assess (a) delivery of services and (b) student learning outcomes in the context of academic advising? If so, (a) when was the most recent assessment of each, and (c) what improvements in academic advising have occurred as a result of the assessment of student learning outcomes?
Staff of the College Academic Advising unit are working other advising units on campus to develop an assessment plan.
4. To what extent have the dean and the associate dean charged with responsibility for assessment of student learning demonstrated their understanding of the importance of assessment to student learning?
The Dean and Associate Dean have demonstrated their understanding of the importance of assessment by providing training to faculty, by hosting a university-wide training event in this building last fall (on rubric development), by encouraging faculty to apply for assessment research grants, by supporting travel by faculty to assessment conferences, and by working to improve their own knowledge of assessment. Much of the learning of the Associate Dean regarding this area has come from extensive and very valuable interaction with Dr. Kathy Cummings. She has proven to be a very valuable campus resource on this topic and is very generous with her time.

Both the Dean and Associate Dean have demonstrated their understanding of the importance of assessment by keeping assessment on the bi-monthly agenda for College council, and by reminding Chairs in various ways of the need and the

rationale for this activity. As noted earlier, due to a long history of work with accrediting bodies, the concepts of assessment are familiar to our faculty and college leadership, and they recognize its value.

c. What are the 2009-10 college goals for the use of learning outcomes results to improve student learning?

1. Complete the transition to TRACDAT, with all units having assessment plans and having mechanisms in place that ensure data are analyzed, findings are derived from data, and that action plans are written for findings as necessary. Mechanisms that ensure that findings translates to actions is especially needed.
2. Continue to support assessment by devoting both GA and Associate Dean resources to building a culture of learning and assessment of outcomes, and provide hardware and software resources as needed to foster assessment efforts.
3. Support departments in developing efficiencies in assessment by reducing overlap between the university assessment process and that of the accrediting bodies.
4. Develop and implement, with support from other colleges, an assessment plan for advising.
5. Evaluate the degree to which assessment is implemented in the unified clinic program and decide whether there is a need for a formal assessment development process for this important function of the College.