

August 1, 2010

Dr. David Reinhold
Associate Provost for Assessment and Undergraduate Programs
Western Michigan University

RE: CHHS Annual Assessment Report

Dear Dr. Reinhold:

This report contains the response to the three questions you asked pertaining to assessment activity in the College of Health and Human Services during the 2009-2010 Academic Year. It provides a summary of the college-level assessment activities initiated during the past year to support departments in assessing student learning. It also provides an overview of our strengths and opportunities relative to assessment and our perceptions of needed improvements. The letter closes with a description of work needed at the college-level to enhance assessment at the departmental level.

Assessment takes place in our academic units. The Dean's office staff assists units in identifying the resources they need to implement their assessment plans, and by encouraging the development of a "culture of assessment". The Associate Dean and his graduate assistant serve the units by aiding in assessment development, assisting with data entry and analysis, and referring department faculty and staff to individuals and resources that can help them advance the assessment agenda. Overall, assessment is relatively strong in the College. We have several departments doing exemplary assessment work (such as Nursing and Social Work). The impetus for a focus on assessment of student learning in CHHS stems in part from requirements that are related to program accreditation/certification approval. Professional programs tend to have an advantage over other programs because of the assessment-related requirements of program accreditation.

The College Curriculum Committee, which is comprised of the departmental and program assessment coordinators, the Associate Dean, and the graduate assistant who supports assessment, met three times during the previous academic year. The meetings were designed to permit one or two programs to present their assessment plans, their findings, the use of their findings, and the challenges they are encountering in assessment of student learning. The intent was for departments and programs to learn from one another and to create awareness of CHHS

progress and commitment to assessment. Given the many demands on faculty, it is easy to lose sight of the value of assessment as a critical catalyst for program change. It also is sometimes difficult for departmental coordinators to develop broad interest in a department for assessment activities. Meeting with other coordinators helps faculty members feel that there are others in the College that share their passion and challenges regarding assessment. Assessment coordinators gain valuable ideas about writing objectives, identifying measurement strategies, blending performance and academic objectives and measures, analyzing data, using assessment to influence curriculum change, and using TRACDAT to make access to assessment results more “friendly”. We will continue these meetings in the upcoming academic year.

Another way the College supports assessment is by providing resources for data entry and TRACDAT support. Much of this support comes from the full-time graduate assistant who supports the Associate Dean. The GA attended each of the three college-wide assessment meetings held last year and attended the Assessment in Action Day. We plan to continue to provide a GA to support assessment activities in the College.

In regard to opportunities for improvement, the departmental reports indicate several key areas to work on in the upcoming academic year. First, some departments still have not migrated to TRACDAT for recording assessment findings. The transition to TRACDAT has added another element to the assessment process, and some departments have not yet made this transition. All of our programs have assessment plans that have been reviewed by the Associate Dean and by assessment experts in the University and College. The plans are sound and are being executed. Learning to use the TRACDAT program and setting up the procedures that will ensure results are complied with and recorded in TRACDAT is an important step in the evolution of our assessment work. This need is particularly evident in two of our departments, and the Associate Dean and the GA will work to ensure this transition is completed in the upcoming year. Another challenge is ensuring that assessment findings are used to stimulate curriculum change and to shape the nature of curriculum change. Some of our departments, such as Social Work and Nursing, have well established mechanisms for conveying assessment results to the departmental curriculum committees. To improve the use of assessment data, we need to extend our ability to connect assessment and curriculum change. The new questions on the curriculum change form (questions 10 and 11) have been useful in ensuring that curriculum committees use assessment data in their work, but, additional work is needed in this area. Finally, some programs have noted a need to involve part-time instructors in the formulation of assessment plans, in carrying out assessment, and in using the results. The Dean’s office will explore this idea in the upcoming year.

In reviewing the individual departmental reports, I note that improvements have been requested in several areas. There is a need for additional, practical, hands-on workshops for assessment coordinators. There also is a need for training to increase the “buy-in” of faculty who are only peripherally involved in the assessment process so that they understand the value of assessment

and are better aware of their responsibilities in this area. Attention to this topic during faculty retreats and faculty meetings will help to keep this topic “in view”. The departments also reported that they want to explore ways to collaborate more across departments. One role of the Dean’s office is to look for potential “economies of scale” in the assessment process in areas such as data gathering (e.g., sharing of surveys) and data entry and analysis.

Thank you for generating a culture of assessment in the University. Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this report or if the College may assist you in any way.

Sincerely,

Dr. Earlie M. Washington
Dean