

The University of Arizona (UA) Plan for Institutional and Program Level Student Outcomes Assessment

A Second Monitoring Report Prepared in Response to the 05-20-2011 Request by the IAC of the Higher Learning Commission
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This report summarizes the progress made in implementing our assessment plan at the University of Arizona, submitted to the IAC of the Higher Learning Commission on August 9, 2011 and approved on August 23, 2011. On pages 2-6, the reader will find the approved plan activities (in black type) along with the implementation updates for each specific activity (in red type). However, we also feel it is important to briefly discuss our original rationale for this plan and the observations we have since made that suggest the plan is having an impact. To begin, these are the three assumptions that guided the development of the activities comprising our plan:

Assumption 1: Ongoing assessment of program level student learning outcomes is best accomplished with sustained engagement by the faculty members who create and teach the curriculum.

Assumption 2: Faculty members understand how to conduct program level outcomes assessment and recognize the potential of the process to improve academic programs.

Assumption 3: A faculty-driven program level outcomes assessment process is strongly supported by university level administration and valued in the process of reviewing academic programs.

These assumptions underlie the central importance of faculty and their departments/programs as the epicenters of real change and improvement in learning outcomes assessment. Central administration must support, mentor, and guide faculties as they build their assessment programs. However, if assessment is to have any chance of supporting improvement in our academic programs, the central administration cannot do the important work of assessment *for* our academic units. Faculty members must build their own outcomes, select or develop assessments appropriate for the outcomes, and use the assessment findings as evidence in their decision-making about ways to improve teaching, curriculum, or other learning activities. All of the activities in our plan align with this essential rationale for a successful learning outcomes assessment plan.

Worth noting, since implementing this plan in August 2011, we have observed the significant placeholder that the coaching/mentoring services offered by assessment experts in our Office of Instruction & Assessment (OIA) has had on engaging faculty in the process. The coaching/mentoring activities follow programs' completion of the Academic Program Review (APR) process. In small groups, 1:1 interactions, and small workshop formats, the assessment experts, who are faculty members themselves, mentor their colleagues about best practices in assessment, provide multiple rounds of formative feedback on the programs' changing assessment plans, and advise on how to use assessment data as evidence in decision-making. At the time of initial plan implementation, the significant impact of this coaching/mentoring was unanticipated. However, we now believe this role of central administration assessment experts to be a necessary and vital component of the UA assessment plan. We highlight this point here only because it is not a highly visible part of the plan that we report on in the following pages. We are convinced that without the coaching/mentoring activities, faculty engagement in the UA's assessment plan, a key element in the overall plan, would be difficult indeed to accomplish.

Table 1. UA Plan for Program Level Student Outcomes Assessment (August 2011)
Assessment Plan Updates for the HLC Monitoring Report in RED (May 2013)

<i>Assumption 1: Ongoing assessment of program level student learning outcomes is best accomplished with sustained engagement by the faculty members who create and teach the curriculum.</i>	
<i>Schedule</i>	Activity 1a: Required Program Level Assessment - All academic programs are required to identify student learning outcomes, identify or build activities/tools and data collection plans for measuring outcomes, collect-summarize-report outcome findings, discuss findings as a faculty, and make changes in programs. Individual programs use a variety of indirect and direct measures to measure student learning at the program level. For an example of this information posted by one of our programs, see: http://assessment.arizona.edu/eng/Mining%20and%20Geological%20Engineering%20Undergrad . MONITORING REPORT UPDATE: Annual updating of assessment information on the website continues to be a required activity for most academic programs. The only exceptions are some professional programs that undergo additional rigorous external accreditation (e.g., Nursing). By May 1, 2013, 51% of all UA academic programs required by the VPAA to report assessment findings had updated their assessment website information during the last year. For an example of a 2013 program posting, see: Appendix A. However, for programs that had recently gone through the APR evaluation, with increased attention to assessment (see Activity 3b below), 95% of the programs reviewed in APR the last two years had updated their websites. Clearly, the increased accountability for reporting assessment results in the APR process is influencing units' assessment reporting.
Once every 3 years after baseline review of all programs	Activity 1b: Regular Assessment of All Campus Program Assessment Processes - All academic program assessment websites are reviewed with a rubric to assess the quality of the programs' assessment processes. A baseline review was completed in March 2011 (see the rubric as Appendix A on pages 8-9 with the average scores from the baseline review of all 165 programs). From our baseline assessment, we have learned that programs need the most help in creating assessments to measure outcomes, organizing their assessment findings, and making changes in response. Individual scored rubrics are sent to each program and each Dean receives copies from all programs in his/her college. Program heads are encouraged to meet with OIA personnel or Assessment Coordinating Council (ACC) members from their colleges (see Plan Component 2a below) for assistance in improving their assessment plans and processes. A time schedule for review of program assessment websites was developed in May 2011. Each of the 165 programs' websites will be reviewed every 3 years. MONITORING REPORT UPDATE; We are on schedule to complete the 3-year reviews, beginning in 2014, since the new plan was implemented in 2011. The review will involve a rubric re-scoring, beginning with the programs that completed their APRs in 2011-12. These data will provide important documentation for each program as improvements are made in its assessment process.

Annual	<p>Activity 1c: The Critical Thinking Assessment Project (CTAP) for General Education – The CTAP uses a course-embedded approach to measure critical thinking skills from samples of student work in General Education and Foundations courses. The critical thinking assignments are developed by the participating faculty members and used in class as assessments. However, the assigned writings, based on a common reading, are then also scored independently using a standardized rubric developed for the project. The CTAP began in the Fall 2009 as a pilot and continues to be implemented today.</p> <p>For a summary report of the first two years of the project, see: http://assessment.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/Critical_Thinking_Assessment_Project_Report_Fall_2010.pdf</p> <p>MONITORING REPORT UPDATE: We are extending the assessment of critical thinking in our General Education and Foundations Courses to Writing Emphasis (WE) courses in the majors (upper division course requirement in every undergraduate major). Preliminary results from a Survey of Writing Emphasis Courses, conducted in 2012-13, are already suggesting that writing competencies are a concern for instructors of our Writing Emphasis courses. See the Preliminary Summary of the Writing Emphasis Survey at Appendix B. This survey assessment of WE instructors’ opinions on writing in their courses is a first step in developing an undergraduate assessment of writing following the CTAP model. Recent discussions are leading to the development of a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) for WE Instructors. These upper division WE courses will become sites for CTAP-like assessments of student writing.</p>
Annual	<p>Activity 1d: General Education Course Reviews - Subsets of Tier One and Tier Two General Education courses are reviewed in alternative years by faculty members of the University-Wide General Education Committee (UWGEC). The reviews take the form of interviews conducted by 2 UWGEC members and the instructor of one of the randomly selected Gen Ed courses. The purpose of the reviews are to document best practices in instruction and to determine the degree to which Gen Ed instructors are implementing the content and instructional criteria expected of the courses. The UWGEC members use a standardized list of questions to conduct the interviews, the notes are submitted to a faculty leader in the group, and the findings are summarized in an annual report. For the summary report for the most recent Tier One review, see: http://gened.oia.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/UWGEC%20Tier%20One%20Survey%20Findings,%20Recs%209-27-10.pdf</p> <p>MONITORING REPORT UPDATE: In 2012-13 the UWGEC began exploring and piloting questions that may be more useful than instructor interviews for gathering learning outcomes assessment information in general education courses. Therefore, a Tier Two interview assessment was not conducted in 2012-2013. In the Fall 2013 the UWGEC will again take up the discussion, including the need for gathering learning outcomes assessment data regularly from all the courses that are a part of our university wide general education course offerings.</p>

Assumption 2: Faculty members understand how to conduct program level outcomes assessment and recognize the potential of the process to improve academic programs.

<p>Monthly during the academic year</p>	<p>Activity 2a: Program Support by College Colleagues - The ACC is comprised largely of associate deans representing the majority of UA colleges, but also includes faculty representation from the General Education program, and staff representation from Student Affairs. The ACC meets regularly to discuss program level assessment and strategies for working with faculty to support improvement of assessment. ACC members serve as information links between academic programs, the OIA, and the Office of the VPAA (Vice Provost for Academic Affairs). The ACC, beginning in the 2011-12 year, will also assist with the rubric-facilitated assessment of program assessment websites (see discussion in Activity 1b). See the current ACC membership at: http://assessment.arizona.edu/council_membership MONITORING REPORT UPDATE: The ACC continues to serve as an important link between institutional level assessment and units that impact student learning across campus. In 2011-12, the ACC conducted website reviews of academic programs’ assessment plans, findings, and changes. However, the process did not result in an efficient means of consistently using that information to coach the faculty and department heads about ways to improve their assessment processes. At this same time, it was noted that the assessment experts in the OIA were experiencing an increasing number of 1:1 consultations about assessment with department heads and faculty members, likely influenced by the elevated expectations for assessment in the APR process (see Activity 3b below). Therefore, beginning in 2012-13, the ACC spent less of its time reviewing websites, now more easily linked to the OIA consultations with departments, and more of its limited meeting time learning about the assessment resources available across campus and discussing how, as associate deans and unit leaders, they might become better sources of information for faculty and department heads in their colleges or units. Beginning in the Fall 2013, the ACC will plan the process for campus-wide data collection on critical thinking and writing outcomes using VALUE rubrics, a part of our commitment to the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) (see Activity 3a).</p>
<p>Beginning in September 2011 and ongoing for several years</p>	<p>Activity 2b: The Faculty Learning Community (FLC) for Assessment Project – The concept of learning communities is identified by the LEAP Program (AAC&U) as a high-impact educational practice. We are creating a FLC for Assessment to engage more faculty members in program level outcomes assessment through interactions with colleagues involved in the FLC. The UA has successfully supported two FLCs, one focused on curriculum challenges and the other focused on developing high quality online programs. At the start, the FLC for Assessment will be comprised of 7-10 faculty members who share an interest in program assessment and improvement. The FLC members will learn about successful program assessment, implement changes in their departments, and become influential assessment leaders in their colleges. Selection of the first Faculty Fellow (leader) for Assessment will occur in August 2011. A 6-member team of faculty members and administrators from our institution who attended a recent AAC&U “Engaging Faculty” institute, called the Assessment Advisory Group, will support and mentor the Faculty Fellow in his/her work with FLC faculty colleagues. The FLC will document their assessment activities within their own programs or colleges as well as their interactions with colleagues for use in assessing the success of the FLC model. MONITORING REPORT UPDATE: The group of 13 FLC members met regularly throughout 2011-12 and 2012-13. Each member conducted his/her own assessment project, each summarized in Appendix C. The two FLC facilitators, Drs. Debra Tomanek and Amy Kimme-Hea, agreed that FLC members learned a great deal about assessment from</p>

	their projects and FLC discussions.
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Annual in spring semester	<p>Activity 2c: Assessment Showcase – The Showcase is held to highlight campus programs that demonstrate best practices in program level assessment. Each showcase has a keynote speaker of national stature in program assessment followed by brief updates/talks by department heads or faculty in charge of program assessment in their units. These annual events generally attract between 40-70 faculty, staff, and administrators from all UA colleges. See information on the 2012 Assessment Showcase at: http://assessment.arizona.edu/node/1285 . MONITORING REPORT UPDATE: For information on the 2012 Assessment Showcase, see http://assessment.arizona.edu/assessment_showcase_2012. In 2013, per suggestions by ACC members, the Showcase format was changed from previous years. In 2013 a keynote speaker was substituted with FLC-member facilitated “Table-Talks” about common challenges with assessment experienced at the program level. For information on the 2013 Assessment Showcase see Appendix D. Evaluations completed by the showcase participants show a majority favoring the table-talk discussions over the keynote speaker format.</p>
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Assumption 3: A faculty-driven program level outcomes assessment process is strongly supported by university level administration and valued in the process of reviewing academic programs.

Ongoing throughout each year	<p>Activity 3a: Institutional Level Support for Program Assessment Assistance – The Office of Instruction & Assessment (OIA) is a unit within the Office of Academic Affairs at the UA. OIA personnel with high levels of academic experience in assessment are available to consult with and support program faculty and program heads in their efforts to build or improve their program assessment plans and practices. In the 12-month period ending in mid-May 2011, the OIA assessment experts interacted with approximately 240 faculty members and administrators through invited presentations, one-on-one consultations, an institution-wide Assessment Showcase event, and written feedback or emails. See the OIA website at: http://oia.arizona.edu MONITORING REPORT UPDATE: In the 12-month period ending May 1, 2013 (the time of this report), the OIA assessment experts had interacted with over 420 faculty, departmental staff, and administrators through the communication sources mentioned in the above paragraph. Much of the increase in interactions is attributable to the close mentoring/coaching that occurs between the OIA assessment experts and the department personnel when the departments begin their work identified on their Post-APR Assessment Improvement Plans. These plans are written by an OIA assessment expert after she has met with the program faculty or department head to discuss their rubric-scored assessment generated in the program’s APR process. In addition to the rubric “scores,” programs are also provided with written feedback on how improvements can be made to the assessment plan. After this post-APR meeting, an OIA assessment expert engages in what often results in a multi-month coaching process where formative feedback on the program’s progress is used by the program to accomplish its Improvement Plan objectives. The ACC has been asked by the VPAA to develop a process for using the AAC&U VALUE rubrics to assess critical thinking and writing in our general education writing program. The ACC will formalize this plan in the Fall 2013 as a part of our institutional decision to join the VSA.</p>
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Ongoing throughout each academic year

Activity 3b: Review of Assessment Sections in Academic Program Review (APR) Self-Studies – Each academic program at the UA is reviewed every 7 years for quality of its program. Reporting of program assessment results has long been a requirement of the APR process. However, beginning in the Fall 2011, all assessment sections in the APR self-studies will be reviewed for quality using a rubric. Members of the Assessment Coordinating Council and assessment experts in the OIA will conduct each review and forward the assessment results to the Vice Provost. If evidence for “closing the loop” by using program level outcomes to make program improvements is missing, the Vice Provost will place the program on probation and request that the department seek assistance from the OIA to improve its practice of program assessment. A follow-up review will be planned to determine whether the program has made progress on its program assessment activities.

MONITORING REPORT UPDATE: We are currently completing the second year of this new APR-linked intervention in our assessment plan. The table below shows the progress made by the 21 academic programs that went through APR as Cohort #1 of our new APR-linked assessment intervention. The blue bars show the overall average rubric score (excluding the scored item for updating on the website) generated at the time of APR and the red bars show the re-score a year later after the program has made its improvements. Only 3 of the 21 programs earned 1-Year Post APR rubric scores lower than the year earlier, due either to under-reporting of data or recent small improvements in the rubric scoring criteria. These programs will make improvements for these deficiencies in the fall. The rubric used to score the APR Self-Study Sections is found in [Appendix E](#).

Rubric Scored Assessment Comparison, APR & 1-year Post APR

