Central Connecticut State University

Academic Assessment at CCSU
July 2008
Executive Summary

- **University Strategic Plan**
  Goals and objectives of the University Strategic Plan were approved by the Faculty Senate in April 2008. The first objective of 48 is to implement a comprehensive outcomes assessment system (see p. 5).

- **Academic Assessment Policy**
  A formal policy for academic assessment was approved by the Faculty Senate in April 2008 (see pp. 6-7).
  - Establishes faculty responsibility for determining and assessing student learning
  - Establishes an annual reporting cycle to include (1) learning outcomes in programs and general education; (2) assessment findings; (3) interpretation of results; and (4) how results are used for improvement
  - Peer review of assessment activities by an elected Academic Assessment Committee

- **Academic Assessment Committee**
  The ad hoc Assessment Committee in place since 1999 will be formally integrated into the shared governance system as a standing Committee of the Faculty with members elected by the Faculty beginning in Fall 2008. The Committee will review assessment activities in each degree program on a multi-year cycle and provide feedback. The Committee will also coordinate the assessment of general education (see p. 8).

Assessment Results

- **General Education**
  - Results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) indicate that seniors report levels of skill development comparable to students at other institutions nationwide; levels were lower than peers for CCSU’s first-year students, suggesting confirmation of efforts directed at broadening the first-year experience (see p. 10).
  - CCSU was the first institution in Connecticut (public or private) to administer the Collegiate Learning Assessment; preliminary results indicate that entering CCSU students performed as expected in the areas of critical thinking, problem solving, analytical reasoning, and writing. The test will be administered again in 2008-09 (see p. 11).
  - Locally developed assessment projects in general education continue to be conducted and will be formally rolled into Departmental assessment systems in 2008-09 (see p. 12).
• **Degree Programs**
  - Learning outcomes have been established in all 36 graduate degree programs and are being published in the 2008-10 Graduate Catalog. Learning outcomes have been established in 50 of 54 undergraduate degree programs (see p. 14).

• **Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)**
  The Faculty Senate voted in Spring 2008 to participate in the Voluntary System of Accountability – a system to improve public understanding about public colleges and universities, including consistent, comparable and transparent information on the characteristics of institutions and students, cost of attendance, student engagement with the learning process, and core educational outcomes. Central’s President Jack Miller served as Vice-Chair of the VSA Learning Outcomes Work Group in development of the VSA. Pre-assessment to first-year students was piloted in Fall 2007 and post-assessment to graduating seniors in Spring 2008. Results will be received later in Summer 2008 (see p. 15).
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University Strategic Plan

Goals and objectives of the University Strategic Plan were approved by the Faculty Senate in April 2008. The first objective of 48 is to implement a comprehensive outcomes assessment system.

Goal 1. Improve Student Learning

Objective 1.1. Identify student learning outcomes for General Education, undergraduate majors, graduate majors and co-curricular activities; establish their integration in the curriculum; and implement outcomes based assessment for all courses, programs, and student academic support services to promote continuous improvement.

Responsibility: Dr. Carl Lovitt, Provost
Dr. Laura Tordenti, Interim Vice President for Student Affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Baseline 2005-06</th>
<th>Progress 2007-08</th>
<th>Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1.1.1. Number of undergraduate programs with learning outcomes</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1.1.2. Number of graduate programs with learning outcomes specified</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enabling Activities

Completed in 2007-08
Specify learning outcomes for all academic programs
Develop and implement assessment policy
Establish University Assessment Committee
Implement Collegiate Learning Assessment
Develop template for reporting assessment results

Ongoing Activities
Specify learning outcomes for co-curricular programs
Encourage curricular integration
Publicize examples of using assessment results to improve programs
Academic Assessment Policy

A formal policy for academic assessment was approved by the Faculty Senate in April 2008.

- Establishes faculty responsibility for determining and assessing student learning
- Establishes an annual reporting cycle to include (1) learning outcomes in programs and general education; (2) assessment findings; (3) interpretation of results; and (4) how results are used for improvement
- Peer review of assessment activities by an elected Academic Assessment Committee

Prior to the adoption of this policy, academic programs had been expected to conduct assessment of their students and complete an annual assessment survey in which they self-reported assessment results. Findings from the survey were tabulated by the Associated Vice President for Academic Affairs and summarized in the University’s accountability report (http://www.ccsu.edu/oira/assessment/accountability/Default.htm).

Policy on Academic Assessment
Approved by the CCSU Faculty Senate, April 14, 2008

As a primary means for evaluating and improving the curriculum and learning process, academic assessment at CCSU is the ongoing activity of determining the extent to which students meet goals for learning outcomes and using findings to improve programs and services. The primary purpose of assessment is to provide faculty and staff with information that can be used to make improvements and adjustments; compliance with external mandates is a secondary, though necessary, purpose of CCSU’s assessment system. As such, each academic department implements an assessment program that clearly articulates outcomes for student learning, measures the extent to which students demonstrate these outcomes, analyzes the findings to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement, and uses the results for curricular or programmatic enhancements or adjustments.

As a part of their critical role in the teaching and learning process, faculty in each department have the primary responsibility for determining the scope and appropriateness of student learning outcomes in each credential-granting program in accordance with standards from their field of study. These outcomes should encompass what faculty deem most important for students to demonstrate in cognitive, behavioral and/or affective domains as a result of completing the program. Using primary measures that extend beyond final course grades, faculty in the department or other qualified professionals designated by the faculty (e.g. internship supervisors or external examinations, but not self-evaluation by students) evaluate the extent to which students demonstrate they have achieved each of these outcomes. In consultation with the Academic Assessment Committee, which is responsible for providing feedback about assessment in academic programs and coordinating the overall assessment program for general education, departments are also responsible for assessing student learning outcomes in general education courses they offer.
On an annual basis, departments provide a report to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. These reports will be placed on a password-protected website accessible to all instructional faculty as well as Deans and the Provost. Reports will include:

1) a list of the learning outcomes for graduates of their program,
2) the findings from their evaluation of student learning in their academic programs and in general education courses offered by their department,
3) an analysis of what these results mean, including an identification of students’ strengths and weaknesses, and
4) a description of how these results have been used to make curricular or programmatic adjustments.

Following the principle of peer review and to identify promising assessment practices, the Academic Assessment Committee will provide feedback and support to departments by reviewing these reports on a multi-year cycle.

The results from assessment of student learning outcomes may not be used for the evaluation of faculty or administrators.

**Assessment Cycle for Degree Programs**

![Assessment Cycle Diagram](image)
**Academic Assessment Committee**

The *ad hoc* Assessment Committee in place since 1999 will be formally integrated into the shared governance system as a standing Committee of the Faculty with members elected by the Faculty beginning in Fall 2008. The Committee will review assessment activities in each degree program on a multi-year cycle and provide feedback. The Committee will also coordinate the assessment of general education.

**Committee By-Laws**

The Academic Assessment Committee is a standing Committee of the Faculty elected by the Faculty and serves as the primary advisory body about practices for the evaluation of student learning outcomes in CCSU’s undergraduate and graduate programs. The Committee also coordinates, but does not implement, the overall program for the assessment of general education learning outcomes. The Committee is responsible for providing feedback and support to Departments by reviewing reports about their assessment of student learning outcomes, and for identifying and disseminating promising assessment practices.

**Primary Functions**

The primary functions of the Academic Assessment Committee are to:

- Provide feedback and support about assessment to Departments on a multi-year cycle through a review of reports about the assessment of student learning in their programs and in general education courses offered by the Department. The Committee addresses assessment models, plans, and use of findings but will not evaluate the level of student performance or learning.
- Identify outstanding or promising assessment practices and make recommendations for awards or grant funding, when available.
- Coordinate the assessment of general education learning outcomes by establishing procedures and practices by which Department-based assessment findings may be connected and aggregated.
- Communicate with the General Education Subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee about student learning in general education and make appropriate suggestions based on findings from assessment.
- Communicate with faculty and the University community to highlight promising assessment models and promote faculty ownership of the assessment process.
- Advise the Office of Academic Affairs about institution-wide initiatives to assess student learning outcomes.
- Consult in the selection of a faculty representative to the CSU System Assessment Committee.

**Membership**

Committee membership will consist of:

- Twelve (12) voting faculty members to be elected by the faculty, with at least one (1) from each School. Elected members serve staggered three-year terms and may serve no more than two consecutive full terms.
- The Deans of each School may choose to appoint one (1) additional voting faculty member to the Committee. Appointed faculty members serve one-year terms, for up to six consecutive years.
- The Director of Institutional Research and Assessment is a non-voting (*ex-officio*) member of the Committee.
## Assessment Results – General Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Education Outcome</th>
<th>How Measured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006-07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. To develop and enhance appreciation for the arts and humanities.</td>
<td>NSSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To develop and enhance global awareness, civic responsibility, appreciation of cultural diversity, and historical awareness.</td>
<td>Local Instr. NSSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To develop scientific understanding of the natural and social worlds</td>
<td>Local Instr. NSSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To develop critical thinking and critical reading skills.</td>
<td>Local Instr. NSSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To strengthen writing and communication skills.</td>
<td>Local Instr. NSSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. To strengthen quantitative skills.</td>
<td>Local Instr. NSSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. To develop computer literacy.</td>
<td>NSSE ECAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. To foster personal health and fitness.</td>
<td>Local Instr. Local Instr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CLA: Collegiate Learning Assessment
ECAR: Education Center for Applied Research - Undergraduate Use of Technology (see [http://www.ccsu.edu/ltc/](http://www.ccsu.edu/ltc/))
Local Instr.: Local assessment instrument designed and administered by CCSU faculty
The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

Results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) indicate that seniors report levels of skill development comparable to students at other institutions nationwide; levels were lower than peers for CCSU’s first-year students, suggesting confirmation of efforts directed at broadening the first-year experience.

CCSU analyzes NSSE results and shares findings each year. For in-depth analysis, please refer to [http://www.ccsu.edu/oira/assessment/surveys/NSSE/Default.htm](http://www.ccsu.edu/oira/assessment/surveys/NSSE/Default.htm).
The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)

CCSU was the first institution in Connecticut (public or private) to administer the Collegiate Learning Assessment; preliminary results indicate that CCSU students performed as expected in the areas of critical thinking, problem solving, analytical reasoning, and writing. The test will be administered again in 2008-09.

The CLA is designed to measure the abilities of incoming first-year students and compare their performance on the test to graduating seniors, after controlling for initial ability upon entry. The 104 first-year students at Central who took the test in Fall 2007 scored at the level their SAT scores would predict.

Relationship between CLA Performance and Incoming Academic Ability

The regression line on this chart represents the expected CLA score of freshmen based on their SAT scores. Because SAT scores explain about 85% of variation in CLA scores, the method of the CLA is to examine the difference between actual and expected scores. When scores for seniors are received, the difference between actual and expected scores for first-year students will be compared to those of seniors to estimate the amount of value that the institution has added to students’ educational development.
Locally Developed Assessment Projects

Locally developed assessment projects in general education continue to be conducted and will be formally rolled into Departmental assessment systems in 2008-09.

By and large, local assessment projects have indicated students have some mastery of general education outcomes in various areas, although the structure of the projects makes it difficult to compare student learning across areas. The results of several projects revealed the limitations of faculty members trying to assess student learning outside of their own areas of expertise. The new Departmental responsibility for assessing general education outcomes delivered by their courses will address this issue.

Critical Thinking
Rubrics were developed by CCSU faculty to measure students’ abilities to think critically. Assessment findings did not provide meaningful results and the participating raters recommended against future projects in which faculty evaluated work outside of their own disciplines. This project has been discontinued.

Foreign Language
Faculty assessed their students based on ACTFL guidelines. In the area of oral proficiency, 9% were rated as approaching the standard, 71% met the standard, and 20% exceeded the standard. This project is ongoing.

Mathematics
Significant work has been completed in the assessment of developmental mathematics courses. Findings indicate that developmental math courses appear to have positive impact on student retention. Analysis of courses with high rates of students earning Ds, F's and Ws has prompted curricular adjustments. This project is ongoing.

Personal Health & Fitness
Students are evaluated regularly in the required PE 144 Fitness/Wellness Ventures. Results indicate just over three-quarters of CCSU students engage in moderate or vigorous physical activity, and four out of five students reported the course made positive differences in their lifestyle choices. Test scores suggest wide variation about health knowledge; the median score was just 60% with a standard deviation of 21 percentage points. This project is ongoing.

Scientific Inquiry
A locally developed multiple choice test was administered to randomly selected sections of science courses that fulfill general education requirements. Findings indicated that science majors scored higher than non-science majors and students who had more general education science courses scored higher on the test. This project was conducted again in 2007-08 (results forthcoming); assessment of this outcome will become a Department-level responsibility.
Verbal Communication
Students were evaluated by faculty on two speeches delivered at the beginning and the end of COMM 115 Fundamentals of Communication. Highest levels of mastery were observed in personal presentation, use of visual aids, and their ability to inform; lowest levels of mastery were observed in voice and making modifications based on feedback, although this final outcome was also the most improved. This project was greatly expanded in 2007-08 (results forthcoming).

Writing
Two systematic writing assessment projects have been undertaken in recent years. The first has been conducted over two years using 100-, 200-, and 300-level courses in English, Sociology, and Honors. Results indicate that women outperformed men and students show better control of addressing a particular audience than developing a chosen topic. Importantly, this project has yielded a rubric with a high level of inter-rater reliability (κ=0.791).

The second project was conducted by the English Department in Spring 2008 in anticipation of the need to report general education outcomes in the Fall. Results are being processed in Summer 2008. This project is ongoing.

More details about most of these projects is available in a summary about general education assessment activities from December 2007 and additional information is available directly from the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. (http://www.ccsu.edu/oira/assessment/default.htm).
Assessment Results – Degree Programs

Establishment of Learning Outcomes
Learning outcomes have been established in all 36 graduate degree programs and will be published in the 2008-10 Graduate Catalog. Learning outcomes have been established in 50 of 54 undergraduate degree programs. Three of the four undergraduate programs still in the process of developing outcomes are interdisciplinary in nature and have required additional consultation and coordination in finalizing these outcomes.

Assessment of student learning outcomes is robust in some programs and still developing in others. Through Spring 2007, CCSU had been administering a survey of academic programs (response rate 67%) which indicated that just under a quarter (23%) of programs responding had an assessment plan fully in place, while just over a half (53%) of responding programs indicated the assessment plan was mostly in place.

Assessment Results
Results were generally positive, with student performance on 20% of outcomes rated as “exceeds expectations” and just over 70% rated as “meets expectations.” Slightly fewer than 10% of outcomes were rated as “below expectations.” To place these findings in context, however, more than half (51%) of undergraduate programs and three out of four graduate programs (77%) responding to the survey indicated that fewer than 30 students had been included in their assessment activities. This level of penetration of assessment initiatives was one of the justifications for implementing the new policy on academic assessment that will institute a system of peer review of assessment programs (see pp. 6-7 above).

Changes Made Based on Assessment Results
Academic programs have reported a wide use of assessment results. In most cases, these changes involve a curricular modification or change in teaching practice. Another commonly reported action was a change in assessment methods to measure student learning in a different way. In many instances, the curriculum and level of student learning was affirmed.

More detail about these results is available online in CCSU’s most recent annual accountability report (http://www.ccsu.edu/oira/assessment/accountability/Default.htm, see pp. 16-23).

The Future of Degree Program Assessment
In accordance with the new policy on Academic Assessment approved by the Faculty Senate, degree programs will submit an annual report (due this year on September 22), and the Academic Assessment Committee will review these reported assessment practices and provide feedback. This system should have the threefold effect of 1) improving assessment practices through peer review and adjustment, 2) increasing the level of participation and the extent to which assessment is woven into the academic culture of the campus, and 3) affording an opportunity to evaluate the quality, not just the quantity, of assessment practices.
Voluntary System of Accountability

The Faculty Senate voted in Spring 2008 to participate in the Voluntary System of Accountability – a system to improve public understanding about public colleges and universities, including consistent, comparable and transparent information on the characteristics of institutions and students, cost of attendance, student engagement with the learning process, and core educational outcomes.

Central’s President Jack Miller served as Vice-Chair of the VSA Learning Outcomes Work Group in development of the VSA. Pre-assessment to first-year students was piloted in Fall 2007 and post-assessment to graduating seniors in Spring 2008. Results for seniors will be received later in Summer 2008.

The VSA College Portrait is divided into three parts:

**Student and Family Information.** These areas include student characteristics, success and progress rates, cost and financial aid, admissions, degrees and areas of study, the community, housing, safety, and graduates’ future plans).

**Student Experiences.** Responses of seniors to one of four national surveys are provided. CCSU will use NSSE. Items include group learning experiences, active learning experiences, institutional commitment to student learning and success, student satisfaction, student interaction with faculty and staff, experiences with diverse groups of people and ideas.

**Student Learning Outcomes.** Institutions must report results from one of three nationally benchmarked tests. CCSU will use the CLA (see p. 11). When fully implemented, the material provided on the VSA College Portrait about learning outcomes will report information about value added by the institution on each task as 1) well above expected, 2) above expected, 3) at expected, 4) below expected, or 5) well below expected.

The University’s official College Portrait is expected to be posted in Fall 2008.

**CLA Student Learning Outcomes from Fall 2007 (First-Year Students)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLA Assessment Task</th>
<th>Performance Level (Fall 2007)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Task</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic Writing Task</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make-an-Argument</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique-an-Argument</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>At Expected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institutions participating in the VSA must provide learning outcomes data no later than 2011.
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