

**ACADEMY FOR ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING APPLICATION
To THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION
of NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
For OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY – OKMULGEE
June 19, 2006**

Oklahoma State University – Okmulgee seeks continuous quality improvement, focusing on applying Quality principles to the institutional processes of assessing student learning and to the accomplishment of system-wide goals. In order to aid in the critique and improvement of its assessment of student learning initiative, OSU-Okmulgee requests the opportunity to join the Academy for Assessment of Student Learning offered by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Below are the responses to six questions required for Academy application. Responses encompass recent college assessment efforts including our “assessment story;” needs, goals, and desired results of involvement in the Academy; commitment, leadership, and capacity for full participation; and competing priorities to consider in this undertaking.

Recent Efforts

1. What is your “assessment story?” Evaluate your past and present efforts.

Assessment at OSU-Okmulgee is “light years” ahead of where it was four years ago. In January 2000 during a comprehensive visit, the Higher Learning Commission Team identified specific areas of concern that warranted a focus visit in 2002. These areas of concern included: [1] Lack of a clear and concise plan for the assessment of student academic achievement; and [2] Lack of General Education core competencies.

At the request of the Higher Learning Commission Team, a progress report on the establishment and mapping of general education competencies with associated assessment measures was submitted January 3, 2004. Similarly, a monitoring report was submitted May 3, 2005 describing the process used to build upon these measures and to develop and implement a comprehensive program of assessment at OSU-Okmulgee. These reports were subsequently accepted, and the process required to generate the reports was the fundamental element in creating the assessment system in place today.

a. Accomplishments

A grassroots initiative, bringing liberal arts faculty and technical program faculty together, was undergone to build a viable assessment system from the ground up. Simultaneously to this process, a five-campus, system-wide strategic planning initiative began. Statements of purpose were developed by faculty, staff, and division leaders for all programs/departments and were linked to the college mission.

Measurable student learning outcomes (hereafter referred to as objectives) and assessments with measurement schedules for subject areas, general education, and student services (leadership, student activities, etc.) were developed out of the mission statements, distinguishing between General Education Core Objectives and Technical Program Objectives. These were included in the strategic plan, assessment plans, and standardized course syllabi. Further, the OSU-Okmulgee Policies & Procedures Manual was amended to reflect the revised Uniform Syllabus guidelines, and a new Assessment of Student Learning section was added.

The product of this monumental campus effort is a well thought through assessment plan and vehicle with which to measure student learning fostering accountability at OSU-Okmulgee. Efforts for continuous quality improvement have been implemented which include: [1] a fully functioning, faculty-driven, campus Assessment Committee; [2] developing division-level Assessment Teams; [3] program-level assessment training for faculty and academic staff each summer semester; [4] assessment training as part of the New Faculty Workshop series each fall semester; [5] Assessment Week each spring semester for students, designed to educate them about assessment of student learning and to measure one Core Objective each year in a focused manner. Results are being used to plan professional development and produce college benchmarks.

b. Issues

OSU-Okmulgee confers primarily Associate degrees. With only two years in which to measure the effectiveness of curricular and programmatic activities for each cohort, assessment plans call for formative and summative measurement and analysis of all Core and Technical Program Objectives each year. This has proven to be a monumental task. To achieve these ends, all faculty have received training with regard to assessment reporting proceedings. Reporting of assessment results occurs at the end of each semester as final semester grades are reported. In order to submit semester grades, faculty must first respond to system-required assessment input. Unfortunately, this process cannot guarantee accuracy of data collection nor can it guarantee enthusiasm in the process.

A major issue to be addressed in the coming academic year is the review and revision of General Education Core Objectives as they relate to the newly accredited Bachelor of Technology programs at OSU-Okmulgee. It is yet to be determined what level of increased competencies (e.g., Communication, Critical Thinking, Ethics, etc.) is required for the Bachelor degrees. Further, assessment requirements for other accrediting agencies such as in Engineering Technologies, Nursing, Information Technologies, and Construction must be addressed and merged within our processes.

c. Barriers

OSU-Okmulgee is challenged to achieve a seamless flow of the assessment process and a mature culture of assessment. There are still some faculty and staff who view assessment of student learning as a laborious task that may be optional. They observe their assessment coordinators on the Assessment Committee working overtime and may perceive them as “assessment victims.” Further, unit leaders may prefer faculty to “take

care of assessment,” freeing up unit leaders to conduct recruitment activities and the myriad of other tasks required of them.

A second difficulty is that faculty who are unclear regarding assessment procedures are reluctant to let it be known, perhaps for fear of being perceived negatively. In an attempt to address this, assessment training for all faculty is conducted each summer semester by the Director of Institutional Assessment & Research. Training allows for discussion of assessment results and hands-on computer applications of the SCT assessment reporting system. Feedback from faculty in these sessions guides modifications to the system for the following year. It also allows for flexibility in assessment knowledge and educational training between divisions. These training sessions have identified a disparity in level of cultural evolution with regard to assessment.

d. Results

A uniform college benchmark has been set by the Assessment Committee: *at least 80% of students will achieve each Core Objective and Technical Program Objective at the 70% level of competency or higher.* Results are measured and tracked within Freshman cohorts. Overall results for the last reporting period indicate that 90% of students achieved the recommended competency level of student achievement. This exceeds by 10% the criterion standard. Individual program of study results ranged from 100% to 77%, identifying need for curricular change and assessment modifications.

Narrative inquiry can reveal qualities of cohort experiences in ways that quantitative results cannot. It can account for the complexity of group behaviors, reveal interrelationships among multifaceted dimensions of program interactions, and help determine questions and types of follow-up research. Further, many faculty at colleges that emphasize teaching over research, such as OSU-Okmulgee, respond effectively to qualitative inquiry. Consequently, faculty also assess student learning through narrative inquiry. It was observed that programs that did not reach the college benchmark of 80% are typically characteristic of lower retention rates. During formative assessment, students who drop out were recorded as “failure to meet” assessment benchmarks. However, drop outs will be removed from the final cohort analysis after graduation, and these results are anticipated to exceed formative results of the existing cohorts. Quantitative and qualitative results are stored and reported in a dedicated server using SCT TracDat software.

e. Strategies

Assessment strategies appear below for students, faculty, and curriculum.

Students

- Course-embedded portfolios, exams, and other assessments
- Laboratory and applied assessments, including Capstone course and end-of-instruction (EOI) assessments and portfolios
- Internship reports and results

- Review of licensure, national examination, and certification scores
- Posttests prior to graduation and graduate exit placement
- Noel-Lovitt Student Satisfaction Inventory, Community College Survey of Student Engagement, and Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Freshman Survey
- Alumni Surveys and Employer Satisfaction Survey
- Assessment Week scores (e.g., California Critical Thinking Inventory, etc.)

Faculty

- American College Testing (ACT) Advising
- ACT COMPASS Course Placement Advising
- College Readiness Center Education (Tutoring) Advising
- Early Alert System Advising
- Student Evaluation of Classroom Teaching
- Annual Performance Evaluation

Curriculum

- Annual Academic Program Assessment
- Oklahoma State Regents of Higher Education Five-year Program Reviews
- The Higher Learning Commission Ten-year Accreditation Reviews
- Specialty Accreditation Program Self-Studies and Site Visits
 - Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc.
 - National League for Nursing, Inc.
 - National Commission on Prosthetics and Orthotics Education

To summarize, OSU-Okmulgee has experienced major successes in recent years with regard to assessment of student learning. Faculty-driven, comprehensive assessment plans have been developed and implemented for academic divisions and are linked to the strategic plan, the college mission, and student support services. Division-level Assessment Teams are underway in some academic divisions. A professional development plan is being implemented to give faculty and staff the understanding and tools they need to use the assessment process to enhance their teaching. Students are becoming aware of the assessment process through Assessment Week activities, campus media, and in some cases participation in the reporting of results of the assessment of student learning.

These efforts have produced positive rewards; however, there are artifacts of the system that have not been or have yet to be fully realized. Specifically, divisions are only beginning to use the data to improve assessment and, more importantly, student learning. Further, some divisions are leaders in the process and others lag behind. A need has developed to close the feedback loop and “tame the data monster.” The following section presents evidence of need and ability to benefit from participation in the Academy.

Needs, Goals, and Desired Results

2. *What are your most pressing needs that you expect to be addressed via your participation?*

OSU-Okmulgee has recently been accredited to confer Bachelor of Technology degrees. The development of assessment plans for these new degrees is in the early stages of development. A specific need is to address the disparate level of Core General Education Objectives between Bachelor and Associate degrees. We believe that participation in the Academy will be greatly beneficial in the development and successful implementation of these plans.

Because Associate degree-seeking cohorts must be assessed in two-year cycles, it can be overwhelming to collect, analyze, report and use data from formative and summative assessment of all objectives in every program during this time period. Consequently, there is a need for parsimonious adjustments to the process and/or schedules of assessment that will benefit student learning in existing programs and spill over to new programs.

OSU-Okmulgee's next PEAQ comprehensive visit is scheduled for 2009-2010. Lessons learned from participation in the Academy will guide our efforts as we prepare for this upcoming site visit. These three needs prompt our desire to participate in the Academy for Assessment of student Learning.

3. *What specific goals and benefits do you want to accomplish through the Academy?*

Academy participation will aid primarily in achieving Goal One from OSU-Okmulgee's Strategic Plan:

Goal One: Academic Excellence and Student Development. Enhance academic excellence in instructional programs campus-wide, embedding technical, educational, and leadership skills across the campus sites and creating educational outreach situations where possible.

Objective 1.1: Enhance academic excellence.

Strategies:

- Develop and implement a division assessment plan for documenting and improving student learning.
- Provide faculty, staff, and leadership training.
- Maintain faculty and administration involvement in the process of assessing student learning.

Other goals from the OSU-Okmulgee Strategic Plan that will result in institutional and student benefit through participation in the Academy are:

- Goal Two:** Recruitment and Diversity. Improve student recruitment, retention and graduation rates.
- Goal Four:** Student Development. Prepare students to be contributing members of society.
- Goal Five:** Leverage Resources. Effectively manage physical, financial and human resources to reduce costs, maximize efficiency and improve services to students and stakeholders.
- Goal Six:** Faculty and Staff Development. Provide a nurturing environment, in alignment with the college mission, for faculty and staff growth.
- Goal Seven:** Economic Development. Enhance the quality of life by contributing to the human, economic, and cultural development of Oklahomans.
- Goal Nine:** Image Enhancement. Enhance the reputation of divisional programs at the local, regional and national level.

Ultimately, the achievement of all goals, including academic excellence and student development, leads to an improved learning experience. The benefit of developing a true culture of assessment is an enhanced learning environment and an enriched institution of higher learning.

4. How do you perceive your goals and desired results will contribute to student learning?

The mission of OSU-Okmulgee is to provide comprehensive, high-quality, advancing technology programs and services that prepare and sustain a diverse student body as competitive members of a world-class work force and contributing members of society. To maintain high quality technology programs, continuous quality improvement initiatives must be an institutionalized feature of day-to-day functioning. The information provided by the Academy will be essential in connecting the college's mission, strategic plan, and future budgeting; however, the definitive goal is improved student learning.

When the college promotes a positive culture of assessment, it also promotes a positive culture of teaching. Faculty are most inspired when assessment discussions are focused on best practices in teaching. Optimal teaching culture includes supportive institutional policies, opportunities for instruction in pedagogy, ongoing formative and summative evaluation of teaching and teaching programs, assessment of student learning, and a coherent infrastructure that supports teaching.

The research on implementation of educational innovations teaches us that when innovations are imposed from the outside they do not last. Educators have learned that when faculty are provided with information about what they are doing in a non-threatening, non-coercive environment, they are much more likely to make changes that are beneficial to students. Providing information about program and overall student

performance increases the likelihood that they will be willing to use the information to make curricular and program improvements. In other words, the Academy shows promise in promoting a dynamic assessment process, which leads to fresh classroom ideas, enhanced enthusiasm among faculty, staff, and students.

Commitment, Leadership, and Capacity

5. What evidence demonstrates your commitment to and capacity for assessment of student learning?

Committed teams have shared vision; budget, staff assignments, space, and timetables to get the project done; agreement on how decisions are made, jobs assigned and common communication processes. OSU-Okmulgee's president and executive vice president have made assessment a priority, using mission-alignment as a standard for precedence. Budget monies have been reallocated to the assessment process as evidenced by the purchase of assessment tracking software (SCT TracDat) and a dedicated server, two faculty stipends to be awarded each year for assessment innovation, professional development for faculty and staff including participation in assessment-related conferences and workshops, and funding for other assessment processes and materials.

Further, the faculty-driven assessment committee has been allocated meeting space and equipment, such as computer equipment for training. OSU System Computer Information Services has also allocated space via Web-For-Faculty for collecting assessment data. Course load release time has been approved for Arts & Sciences faculty, and timetables as well as tasks have been communicated. Intra-discipline, division-level assessment committees have been initiated and are now an official part of college policy.

The most poignant evidence of commitment is the long hours of uncompensated service and enthusiasm by many faculty members on the Assessment Committee. The faculty chair of the committee has authored a comprehensive, campus-friendly user manual for the new assessment reporting software. Others have volunteered their services outside of normal work hours as well as during holidays and summer breaks to prepare for assessment training and to meet deadlines.

Competing Priorities

6. What other major institutional initiatives, pressing issues, current circumstances, or other priorities might interfere with your intended goals for and full participation in the Academy?

As is true with any initiative, some divisions are more advanced in their assessment programs than are others. Several academic divisions are assessment leaders and meet routinely to discuss curricular implications from assessment results outside of the college

Assessment Committee work. However, there exist assessment followers who require additional training to understand the significance of these efforts to the System.

Further, divisions with multiple accrediting agencies (e.g., ABET, etc.) must reframe their perspective from one of “competing accrediting agencies” to a framework which allows for the integration of all requirements into a whole.

Finally, some faculty and staff have been concerned that a great deal of time and labor would be required to implement a fully functioning, comprehensive assessment plan that will generate curricular changes and data-driven decision making. These concerns have been confirmed; however, programmatic change cannot be realized without intensive effort and academic resources. We know the college is a better institution for the effort.

The central premise of Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline* is that the only organizations that will exist in the future will be those in which everyone is a learner. This prediction contains a powerful message for education. If we are truly committed to the belief that everyone can learn, then we must necessarily be committed to learning for all—faculty, staff, administrators, and students.

"If our destination is excellence on a massive scale, not only must we change from the slow lane into the fast lane; we literally must change highways. Perhaps we need to abandon the highways altogether and take flight, because the highest goals that we can imagine are well within reach for those who have the will to excellence." Asa Hilliard

References

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