

**PROGRESS REPORT ON ASSESSMENT
FOR THE HIGHER LEARNING
COMMISSION OF THE NORTH
CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF
COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS**

August 1, 2005

**OFFICE OF THE PROVOST
DUBOURG HALL
221 NORTH GRAND BOULEVARD
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63103-2097
(314) 977-3078**

Saint Louis University
Progress Report on Assessment for the Higher Learning Commission
August 1, 2005

Introduction

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Consultant-Evaluator Team completed a comprehensive site visit to Saint Louis University on April 15-18, 2002, and the findings from this comprehensive site visit were summarized in their exit report. The otherwise complimentary report accurately observed that “implementation of assessment is generally consistent at the unit level; however, not all of the elements for a comprehensive plan are in place.” The report further noted “quality-control is not evident across the University, improvement of programs based on feedback is not consistent, information is not aggregated institution wide, monitoring and repor

academic units (consistent with the principle of subsidiarity), yet mandates that evidence regarding the success of curricular, instructional, and assessment programs in meeting University and academic program goals must drive the decision-making process. The ultimate goal of creating a culture of evidence-based decision making is improved institutional effectiveness and enhanced student learning (Bauer, 2003).

In turn, the development of a culture of evidence-based decision-making across the University requires (1) a fundamental understanding and articulation of outcomes assessment at the core-course, academic program, and University levels and (2) an ongoing series of professional development opportunities for faculty, department heads, and deans in the areas of effective instructional practices and outcomes alignment, articulation, and assessment. These represent the two prongs of the strategy employed by Saint Louis University not only to meet the requirements laid out for the University by the exit report but also to move the institution closer to the goal of a University-wide culture of evidence-based decision making.

First Steps

Saint Louis University has taken seriously the Consultant-Evaluator Team's general assessment of the University, the advancement section of the exit report, and the areas cited above requiring institutional attention and Commission follow-up. The University assigned the Associate Provost for Planning and Decision Resources the task of coordinating all institutional assessment activities, creating a University-wide assessment committee, and charging the committee with the five-fold task of (1) sharing best practices and resources for outcomes and assessment methods, (2) promoting outcomes and assessment activities across the University, (3) identifying assessment experts among faculty and staff to work with departments and programs, (4) assessing faculty and department developmental needs in outcomes assessment and making recommendations for activities and delivery to meet needs, and (5) serving as an advisory group to the Office of Planning and Decision Resources in the design of institutional-level assessment. These actions are consistent with best practices (Walvoord, 2004) and signal Saint Louis University's commitment not only to meeting the requirements cited above but to moving the institution forward toward a culture of evidence-based decision making.

Refinement of University Outcomes

University-level assessment presupposes a clear and widely understood articulation of University-level outcomes that serve as the starting point of the assessment process. At the time of the site visit of the Consultant-Evaluator Team, Saint Louis University had identified 23 separate outcomes for graduates of the University. Subsequent to the visit, in discussions among the Provost, deans, and Associate Provost, it became clear that these outcomes were not a viable framework for assessment at the University since they did not adequately reflect the unique mission of the University, did not take into account the differences in programs across the University (undergraduate, graduate, and professional), were written in the past tense as summative evaluations (e.g., "The graduate should have developed..."), and sometimes overlapped (e.g., "The graduate should have developed a persistent intellectual curiosity," and "The graduate should have developed a commitment to lifelong learning"). In addition, several outcomes were either not measurable or were difficult to assess (e.g., "The graduate should have developed respect for human life and the dignity of each person"). A compounding problem was that the outcomes were unwieldy in number. Consequently, individual programs tended to

assess only those of the 23 outcomes that were most closely related to their academic disciplines (e.g., “The graduate should have developed extensive knowledge in an area of study, competence for and in a profession, and preparation for advanced study”). A revised framework was needed if there were to be a comprehensive outcomes and assessment effort.

A key challenge in developing a workable student learning outcomes framework was to ensure that it reflected the unique mission of Saint Louis University (in Appendix A) or, more specifically, that it operationalized the mission in the form of relevant student outcomes. The framework also needed to be clear in its meani

B) Core Course Outcomes Alignment for the Undergraduate Experience

The Associate Provost, the faculty intern for assessment (described in the Faculty Development section below), and the associate deans provided additional support to departments, particularly in the College of Arts and Sciences, that needed guidance in the articulation of measurable outcomes and worked to standardize and operationalize the information submitted to ensure the utility and alignment of the assessment practices with outcomes.

In the framework of the Five Dimensions, faculty in every program of study in the University have now identified outcomes, arti

Based on the findings from the OPDR studies and the discussions at the Summits, the University has made significant changes to enhance opportunities for undergraduate students to integrate

practices and outcomes alignment, articulation, and assessment. Such a diffusion of knowledge nurtures the development of professional learning communities within all academic units and encourages individual faculty members to engage in action research regarding their own effectiveness in helping students reach course and program outcomes. A key target in building leadership capacity throughout the University

References

- Bauer, K. W. (2003). Assessment for institutional research: Guidelines and resources. In W. E. Knight (Ed.), *The primer for institutional research* (pp. 9-23). Tallahassee, FL: Association for Institutional Research.
- Wolverton, M., Gmelch, W. H., & Sorenson D. (1998). The department as double agent: The call for department change and renewal. *Innovative Higher Education*, 22, 203-215.
- Walvoord, B. E. (2004). *Assessment clear and simple: A practical guide for institutions, departments, and general education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Walvoord, B. E. (2005, April). *Assessing learning: Building on what you have*. Paper presented at the meeting of the North Central Association, Chicago, IL.
- Walvoord, B.E. & Anderson, V. J (1998). *Effective grading: A tool for learning and assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Appendix A

Saint Louis University

Mission Statement

The Mission of Saint Louis University is the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity. The University seeks excellence in the fulfillment of its corporate purposes of teaching, research and community service. It is dedicated to leadership in the continuing quest for understanding of God's creation, and for the discovery, dissemination and integration of the values, knowledge and skills required to transform society in the spirit of the Gospels. As a Catholic, Jesuit University, the pursuit is motivated by the inspiration and values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and its guided by the spiritual and intellectual ideals of the Society of Jesus.

In support of this mission, the University:

Encourages and supports innovative scholarship and effective teaching in all fields of the humanities, the natural, health and medical sciences, the social sciences, the law, business, aviation, and technology.

Enables an academic environment which values and promotes free, active and original intellectual inquiry among its faculty and students.

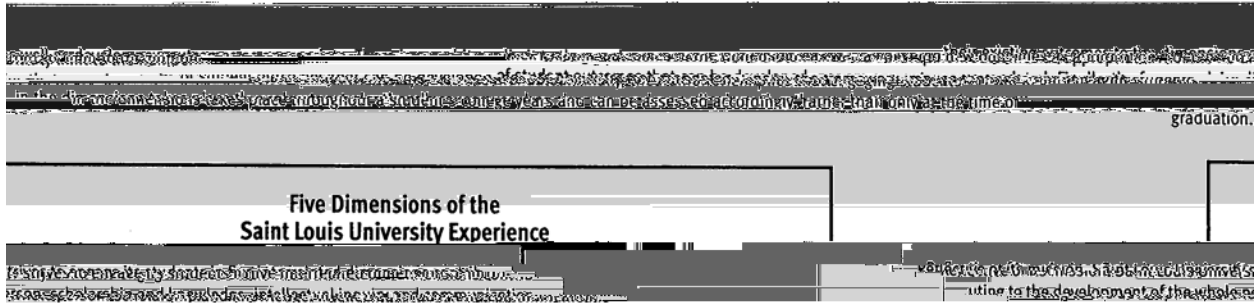
Maintains and encourages programs which link the University and its resources to its local, national, and international communities in support of efforts to alleviate ignorance, poverty, injustice, and hunger, to extend compassionate care to the ill and needy, and to maintain and improve the quality of life for all persons.

Strives continuously to seek means to build upon its Catholic, Jesuit identity, and to promote

Appendix C

Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement, 2005

Volume 3: Becoming a Learning Focused Organization:





Appendix D

**Saint Louis University
Deans' Annual Assessment Reports**

PSYK 205, Research Methods and Statistics, was revised to strengthen instruction on accessing scholarly literature using databases.

Cook School of Business, Undergraduate Program

An experimental course, Freshmen in Business, will be launched in fall 2006 in response to issues about undergraduate student engagement which surfaced in the EBI, NSSE, and focus groups.

Cook School of Business, MBA

During the course of the last two years, the Cook School has been involved in major overhauls of its MBA programs, implementing a new professional MBA program in fall 2004 and continuing to develop a new full-time MBA program for implementation in summer 2006. These revisions were initiated and have been driven by information from a number of sources including student focus groups and individual interviews, discussions with business managers who serve on the Dean's Executive Board and department advisory boards, information from internship site supervisors, feedback from outside judges on live cases presented by MBA student teams, and enrollment and placement data.

School of Medicine, Doct

Parks College, Physics

One of the learning outcomes of the Physics program is proficiency using computers to solve

School of Social Service

The School of Social Service, along with faculty from 11 other majors, is developing a new course, entitled Orientation to the Helping Professions. Faculty and student support staff identified the need for a course that would review helping professions, such as social work, education, and the health professions. Social work will host the two-credit course for the first time in spring 2006.

Leadership and Service

By serving others and by promoting social just

Other Indicators of Effectiveness